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LECTURES

ON

SOME OF THE PRINCIPAL

EVIDENCES OF REVELATION;

DELIVERED AT

The Monthly Meetings

OF THE

ASSOCIATED MINISTERS AND CHURCHES OF THE LONDON CONGREGATIONAL UNION.

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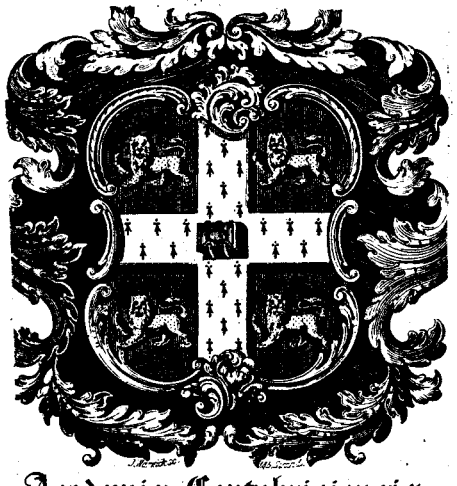

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TABLE OF CONTENTS.

PREFACE . . . . . p. vii

LECTURE I.

Delivered at Fetter Lane, January 5, 1826.

THE ADVANTAGES OF AN ENLARGED ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE EVIDENCES OF REVELATION.

Heb. xiii. 9.—It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace . . . . . p. 1—38

BY THE REV. WILLIAM ORME,
OF CAMBERWELL.

LECTURE II.

At Barbican, February 9, 1826.

THE DIVINE LEGATION OF MOSES, AND THE LEADING FEATURES OF THE MOSAIC ECONOMY.

Luke xvi. 31.—And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead . . . . . p. 41—69

BY THE REV. W. B. COLLYER, D.D. LL.D. F.A.S. &c.
OF PECKHAM.

LECTURE III.

At New Court, Carey Street, March 9, 1826.

THE EVIDENCE ARISING FROM PROPHECY.

Isaiah xlvi. 9, 10.—I am God, and there is none like me; declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times, the things that are not yet done . . . . . p. 73—94

BY THE REV. H. F. BURDER, M. A.
OF HACKNEY.

LECTURE IV.

At Claremont, April 6, 1826.

THE EVIDENCE ARISING FROM MIRACLES.

John iii. 1, 2.—There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: the same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher sent from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him . . . . . p. 97—130

BY THE REV. JAMES STRATTEN,
OF PADDINGTON.

LECTURE V.

At Paddington, May 4, 1826.

THE EVIDENCE DERIVED FROM THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST.

John i. 14.—We beheld his glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth . . . . . p. 133—158

BY THE REV. WILLIAM WALFORD,
CLASSICAL TUTOR OF HOMERTON COLLEGE.

LECTURE VI.

At Islington (Lower Street), June 8, 1826.

ON THE EVIDENCE TO THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF CHRISTIANITY FROM THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

1 *Cor.* xv. 3, 4.—I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received; how that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried; and that he rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures . . . . . p. 161—192

BY THE REV. JOHN PYE SMITH, D. D.
THEOLOGICAL TUTOR OF HOMERTON COLLEGE.

LECTURE VII.

At Peckham, July 6, 1826.

THE EVIDENCE DERIVED FROM THE SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL.

Acts v. 34—40.—Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel .... and said .... Refrain from these men, and let them alone; for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought, but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God . . . . . p. 195—242

BY THE REV. ANDREW REED,
OF NEW ROAD, CANNON STREET.

LECTURE VIII.

At Maberley, August 10, 1826.

INTERNAL EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

Heb. i. 1.—God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son . . . . . p. 245—276

BY THE REV. SPEDDING CURWEN,
OF BARBICAN.

LECTURE IX.

At Deptford, September 7, 1826.

THE PRACTICAL INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY AN EVIDENCE OF ITS DIVINITY.

Matt. vii. 15—20.—Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? . . . . . p. 279—304

BY THE REV. ROBERT PHILIP,
OF MABERLEY.

LECTURE X.

At Stepney, June 10, 1824.

THE EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY.

1 *John* v. 10.—He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself . . . . . p. 307—329

BY THE REV. JOHN MORISON,
OF CHELSEA.

LECTURE XI.

At Stepney, October 5, 1826.

THE BEST METHODS OF COUNTERACTING INFIDELITY.

2 *Cor.* x. 4.—For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds . p. 333—357

BY THE REV. ROBERT WINTER, D.D.
OF NEW COURT, CAREY STREET.

LECTURE XII.

At White Row, Spitalfields, December 7, 1826.

ON THE MYSTERIES OF REVELATION.

Psalm cxxxix. 6.—Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it . . . . . p. 361—402

BY THE REV. JOSEPH FLETCHER, M.A.
OF STEPNEY.

PREFACE.

THE following Lectures owe their publication to the resolutions successively passed at the "Monthly Meetings," of the Ministers and Members of Congregational Churches, before whom they had been previously delivered. From their constituting the first part of an extended series, and their embracing topics not frequently discussed in the ordinary discharge of the Christian ministry, it was thought desirable to publish them together, rather than in a separate form; and it is hoped that by this arrangement they will be rendered of more permanent advantage to the cause of Christian truth.

As little comparatively is known respecting the "Monthly Meeting," it is thought proper to insert in this place, a brief account of its history, extracted from a Discourse published a short time ago by the Rev. Dr. Winter, entitled, "The beneficial Tendencies of Christian Association." The Discourse was delivered at the close of the series of Lectures which preceded the present course. Of this Association, Dr. Winter observes:

"It originated in the year 1730. The impelling motive which gave birth to it was, the earnest concern

of several ministers and others, to promote among the Protestant Dissenters a greater regard, than they supposed at that time to exist, to the leading doctrines of the Reformation. With this view they formed themselves into a society, and adopted two plans, in order to accomplish, with the blessing of God, their great object.

"One was, the institution of these 'Monthly Exercises.' The other was, the formation of a plan for the education of young men for the ministry; a plan out of which, together with some important co-operations, has arisen that most valuable seminary now designated 'HOMERTON COLLEGE.'

"When these services commenced, at the period before mentioned, they wore rather a different aspect from that which they afterwards assumed. For one winter and spring season, a weekly sermon, on some important doctrine of the Gospel, was preached in one place, the Rev. Mr. Bragge's Meeting-house, in Lime-street; although the preachers consisted of several ministers of talent, respectability, and determined attachment to evangelical truth. These were the 'Lime-street Lectures,' which were afterwards printed in two volumes. The names of Bragge, Abraham Taylor, Sladen, Goodwin, Hurrien, Bradbury, Wilson, Hall, and Gill, are sufficient to recommend the discourses to attention; and they will be found to contain generally a luminous statement, and an able defence, of the several topics which they discuss.

"From the expiration of that course the Lectures became monthly, and circulated to various places of worship in London, and a few beyond the limits of

the metropolis. They were also more largely accompanied with prayer than most public services at that time among the Dissenters. And from the formation of the seminary at Plasterer's Hall, afterwards at Mile End, and now for many years at Homerton, the two institutions were considered as closely connected.

"In its origin, and for many years afterwards, this Lecture was not limited to the Congregational denomination. It included several Anti-pædobaptists, who at length deemed it expedient, in the most friendly manner, to separate, forming the association known by the name of the Baptist Monthly Meeting. In the earlier lists of this association occur the names, not only of Gill and Wilson, who were joint labourers with their brethren at Lime-street, but Stennett and Wallin, and several others. It also included, within the recollection of some of us, a few Presbyterians, although I believe those only who were connected with the Church of Scotland. The immediate and ostensible bond of union was, the Society engaged in supporting the academical institution.

"For some years the Monthly Meeting has been limited to the ministers and churches of the Congregational denomination. And so extended has the denomination become, that it may perhaps be more profitable that the meeting should be considered as thus limited; and this with the most friendly and brotherly feelings towards our fellow-Christians, who in this respect 'follow not with us.'"

Since the commencement of the present course, part of which is now submitted to the attention of the public, an attempt has been made to render the existing

arrangements of the Monthly Meeting as much as possible subservient to the formation of a general union of Congregational churches and ministers in the metropolis. Some of the details of that union are already before the public; and it is hoped, that neither indifference nor misconception will prevent the maturity of its plans, or the accomplishment of its objects. On the subject of *Union*, the following judicious observations occur in the discourse of Dr. Winter, referred to above:

"It was not to one religious society alone, such as the church at Corinth, or the church at Philippi, but it was to 'the churches of Galatia,' the several assemblies of Christians in that province, that the apostle Paul addressed that harmonizing language — 'Ye are all one in Christ Jesus;' — 'By love serve one another.' The most plausible objection to the congregational principles of church government (principles, by the way, which are almost universally adopted by the Protestant Dissenters of England, of every denomination) is, that they ascribe to each society too much individuality of character, and so hinder that joint operation which would effect more extensive good. But the objection arises, not from the principles themselves, but from their abuse and perversion. The great champion of Congregational churches, Dr. Owen, pleads for much more communion of churches than has generally been practised, and largely illustrates this important position, that the great design of the formation of particular churches is to advance the interests of '*the church catholic*,' the multitude of believing people scattered over the face of the earth.

"It will be recollected by some of my hearers, that, many years ago, an effort was made to form a union of Congregational churches through the kingdom; a union, not of authority, but of love and co-operation. That effort failed, partly because, perhaps, it aimed at too much; and partly because a groundless apprehension was excited among many good people, that it would tend to secularise the spiritual kingdom of Christ, and to give to Christian ministers, indirectly, a degree of domination over God's heritage, which would prove injurious to the separate rights of the churches, and 'the liberty with which Christ has made us free.'

"To the union of Christian churches in a province, or in a large city, surely there can be no such objection. These circulating devotional services, together with the opportunities of friendly converse connected with them, are adapted to awaken or preserve a fellow-feeling in each church for all the churches united, to guard against all approximation to jealousy or rivalry in neighbouring societies, and to render the whole productive of a much greater proportion of good than has resulted from each separate part."

"If we cease to associate, in our capacity as Christian ministers and Christian churches, we are destroying one of the principal links of connexion between the individual reception of the Gospel and the manifestation of the savour of the knowledge of Christ. The more Christians in every place, and especially the more the Christians of London, keep together, the more united will be their prayers, and the more efficient their labours, 'that the ways of our God may be known upon earth, and his saving health among all nations.'"

In introducing this volume to the notice of the world, it only remains to be observed, that the Tenth Lecture, by the *Rev. John Morison,* was delivered in connexion with a course that preceded the present list; and therefore, in arranging the subjects of that list, the subject was not included, on account of its having been so recently discussed. *The Rev. B. Rayson* was to have delivered a discourse on the *Conversion of Saul of Tarsus,* but was prevented by domestic affliction, from fulfilling his engagement. In these circumstances, the ministers and friends assembled at one of the meetings, requested Mr. Morison to allow his former discourse to appear in this volume. The discourse on the "Mysteries of Revelation," was not designed to be included in the first series of subjects; and this is mentioned merely to account for some particular references in that lecture, which might otherwise appear singular, to those who are unacquainted with the circumstance.

N. B. THE PROFITS ARISING FROM THE SALE OF THE VOLUME WILL BE DEVOTED TO THE INTERESTS OF THE "LONDON CONGREGATIONAL UNION."

LECTURE I.

THE ADVANTAGES OF AN ENLARGED ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE EVIDENCES OF REVELATION.

By WILLIAM ORME.

LECTURE I.

THE ADVANTAGES OF AN ENLARGED ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE EVIDENCES OF REVELATION.

HEBREWS xiii. 9.

It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.

WERE it proper to occupy the time of a Christian Assembly with lengthened apologies for addressing it, I think I should be furnished with some available pleas on this occasion. I exceedingly regret that among so many individuals, distinguished for their talents, their learning, and their experience, the courtesy of his brethren should have placed him as the leader of the company, who ought rather to have occupied the rear; and that with much less time for preparation than will be afforded to his successors, he should be called to discuss before you one of the most important topics in this extended course. But complaints are not remedies for any misfortune; and the Christian Minister ought not to shrink from any duty which the providence of God, or the reasonable wishes of his brethren, may demand. Trusting, therefore, to your candour, and to the promised aid and blessing of Him, who hath engaged to perfect his strength in our weakness, I shall address myself to this undertaking.

The subject assigned to me, on this occasion, is—"The Advantages of an extensive Acquaintance with the Evidences of Revelation;" and the bearing of the passage, which I have selected as the motto of this discourse, on that subject, it will not be very difficult to show.

The Apostle, in the context, reminds the Hebrews of the loss of some of their leaders, who, after having spoken to them the word of God, had illustrated the power and influence of that word in the peaceful close of a career of activity and usefulness. The faith of such men he enjoins them to follow; and to comfort them under the loss of their society and service, he brings before them the delightful truth, that "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever." While He lives, the resources of his church cannot fail, and the ravages of death cannot hurt.

From the fact of the unchangeableness of Christ, and the fulness and clearness of the discoveries made respecting him, the Apostle urges upon his brethren the evil of fickleness and caprice in the profession of his religion, and the importance of maintaining a decided adherence to its great truths. "Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines,"—doctrines diverse from those taught by the Apostles, and at variance with each other, as well as foreign from the nature and design of the christian system. Doctrines of this description have been inculcated in every age, and have proved both trials and tests of the people of Christ. Sometimes they have originated in speculations about the law; at other times they have been derived from the imposing pretensions of a "vain and deceitful philosophy;" and, in numerous instances, they have sprung out of crude and ill-digested views of the evangelical system itself.

That system is eminently a scheme of grace or favour. Its origin, its provisions, and its discovery, are all distinguished by this prominent feature. And hence the term grace is sometimes employed in the New Testament, to denote the principle or disposition in the Divine mind, from which all spiritual blessings in heavenly things emanate; and, at other times, the leading blessings themselves. It is in the latter sense I understand it to be used in the text. It seems there to signify the *gracious dispensation*, including its doctrines, provisions, and evidences, in opposition to that economy, which consisted more in meats and external observances, than in "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost."

This heavenly scheme, or constitution, is excellent in all its parts and operations. "It is a faithful saying," and is therefore "worthy of all acceptation." If it is a good thing to know it, it must be good to have the heart established in its truth, and the power of its influence; and as this cannot take place without an extensive and accurate acquaintance with its evidences, it must be the duty and interest of every christian to have a full and a commanding knowledge of them.

Were the part assigned to me this morning detached and unconnected with other topics, I would at once, after these introductory remarks, enter on its consideration. But as it stands at the head of the whole present course of Lectures, as well as at the commencement of that section of the course to which it more properly belongs, it will be expected that I should briefly advert to the entire plan, and then to the first division of it, before I proceed to the topic which has been allotted to myself.

A single glance at the list will satisfy the observer, that it consists not of a miscellaneous, unconnected mass of subjects of acknowledged importance. It was deemed advisable to form a plan of a more systematic nature, and to make the discourses, while each should be complete in itself, as far as practicable, bear a certain relation to each other, and to the whole.

Too much importance cannot be attached to enlarged and well-arranged views of the great plan of heavenly mercy. Many are satisfied with a superficial knowledge of its first principles, and a few of its details, who never comprehend the relative connexions of its truths, and who remain, in a great measure, blind to the extent, the harmony, and the grandeur of the whole. In consequence of this, their growth as christians is slow and dwarfish. Their ideas are not only contracted and imperfect; they are distorted and erroneous. They dwell on the first elements, instead of going on to perfection; and are capable of digesting only the milk of the word, not of receiving its strong meat. Often, in these days of boasted light and silken prosperity, do we meet with men "a hundred years old" but children;—men of gray hairs in the christian profession, occupying the lowest forms in the school of Christ; who, had their diligence and improvement corresponded with their advantages, might have held the place of teachers.

It is the duty of the ministers of Christ to endeavour at least to provide a remedy for this state of things; and it is the object of this new course of monthly Lectures to contribute a little to the accomplishment of this object. With this view, the list is divided into three great sections:—the first is devoted to the evidences of Revelation; the second, to a certain number of its more important doctrinal and practical truths;

and the third to the consideration of those principles by which we are particularly distinguished as Protestant and Congregational Dissenters.

The preliminary inquiry to all examination of the subject of revelation, undoubtedly is—What ground have we for believing that it is from heaven, and not of men? Should this inquiry be determined in the negative, all subsequent investigations may be suspended. The Scriptures can then have no claim on our obedience or submission. We might, perhaps, continue to admire the beauties of their style, the purity of their morality, and the benevolence of their aim; but, destitute of claim to the character of truth, we could neither subscribe to their statements, nor cherish the hopes or fears which they inculcate.

But supposing the inquiry to be determined in the affirmative,—that we arrive at a successful and powerful conviction of their divine origin; a train of the most momentous consequences immediately follows. It is no longer at our option to receive or reject them; we are bound by the highest authority in the universe to acknowledge them as the only rule of faith, the supreme standard of duty, and the exclusive source of future hope. Ascertained to have come from God, they must contain truth, nothing but truth, and truth of the highest importance. Their discoveries must be, if not at variance with, necessarily beyond the reach of unaided reason, otherwise the necessity of the revelation could not be made to appear. They must embrace topics involving the glory of the divine character, as well as the eternal interests of man; or the wisdom and suitableness of the communication would not be evident. They must possess an inherent authority, belonging at once to the nature of truth and of its Author, the rejection of which involves not

only ignorance or disallowance of satisfactory evidence, but the guilt of disobedience to a positive command of the heavenly Lawgiver. The man who trifles with, or rejects this evidence, is guilty of "making God a liar;" the man who assents to the testimony, and disputes the doctrines or injunctions which it obviously makes known, is guilty of the most glaring inconsistency, and is justly obnoxious to the severe sentence of our Lord—"This is the condemnation, that light hath come into the world, but men have loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

The acknowledgment of the truth of the Scriptures, when made in sincerity, and the admission that we are bound to receive and obey whatever they contain, will necessarily produce a desire to know what are the leading and most important subjects, which they bring into view. That they will contain or imply many things not easily to be understood, far less fully comprehended in the present state, might be expected, if there exists any analogy between the natural and moral administration of Jehovah. If there are mysteries in a blade of grass, a drop of water, or a grain of sand,—not to speak of the arcana of the universe—the number or magnitude of the hosts of heaven,—we must expect inscrutable things in that mighty scheme into which "angels desire to look," and which embraces the salvation and everlasting destiny of countless millions of fallen creatures. Blessed be God! the most important truths are revealed with the brightest lustre; the grand discoveries of the mysteries of redemption are "without controversy" among all genuine believers; so that, while we say, with profound reverence, "the secret things belong to the Lord our God," we can add, with high satisfaction and gratitude, "the things that are revealed belong to us and our children for ever."

Among these well-established truths, are the entire depravity of our apostate race;—the provision made by God for the cure and forgiveness of that depravity in the Atonement of the Son of God;—the well-ordered arrangements for the successful administration of the benefits of that Atonement in the mediatorial government of Christ;—the means by which the blessing of God's method of justification, which is founded on the Atonement, are conveyed;—the necessity, the extent, and the beneficial tendency of the influences of the Holy Spirit; the practical experience and manifestation of these influences, in the sanctification of the character and the assurance of hope;—the display of the mercy and sovereignty of God, in the election of men to believe, and the power and faithfulness of God displayed in enabling those who believe to persevere:—these are some of the great foundations and pillars of the heavenly system, on which the whole fabric and superstructure of it rests.

The tendency which belongs to all peccable creatures, and consequently to christians, to lose the impressions of divine things, and to forsake God, with the causes which produce or operate on that tendency, and the means by which it may be counteracted, together with the nature and evidence of meetness for heavenly happiness, are properly connected with the preceding subjects; while all that is calculated to elevate the mind,—to stimulate the soul to holy desires and active enterprise, as well as to give calmness, decision, and dignity to the character,—belongs to the doctrine of the resurrection, and the final glorification of all the redeemed. On all these highly momentous and interesting subjects, the ministers of

this Association purpose to lay before their friends and brethren what appears to them to be the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures.

If, by the divine favour, they shall be permitted to illustrate these subjects, they will then direct your attention to another class of topics, not by any means of equal importance with the former, but well deserving of your consideration, as parts of the will of God, and as especially applicable to your profession as dissenters from all civil establishments of christianity. The glory of the kingdom of Christ, when first instituted, consisted in the spirituality of its subjects, and the purity of its administration. That glory, however, was tarnished at a very early period, and was at length in a great measure obscured, when the church became incorporated with a secular kingdom. The Reformation—that eminent work of God—did much to correct the abuses and corruptions which had overspread and infected the whole system of religion, which had long been falsely called Christianity. But it is no disparagement to the reformation to say, that it did not effect an entire cure. Had this been the case, the evils must have been of less magnitude than they really were, or the reformers more than fallible men.

It brought into view the supreme authority, not of the church, but of its immortal Head; as conveyed, not in the vague and uncertain traditions of erring and mortal creatures, but in the written record of inspiration. It taught men not to merge their faith in blind submission to the dicta of others, but to exercise the right of private judgment, and to form their own opinions by a free and full examination of the revealed will of God. The advantages and defects of the reformation are thus peculiarly worthy of consideration.

Believing, as we do, that the puritans and nonconformists carried the reformation a step farther, and that its grand principles have been most consistently maintained by the congregationalist body of Dissenters, a portion of time will be devoted to the illustration of their distinctive views and principles. Consistency, and conscientious regard to the will of God, require that we should be able to give a reason of our practice as well as of our hope; and of that part of our practice, too, in which we differ from christians of other fellowships. Hence we mean to state the general principles of protestant, and the scriptural evidence of congregational nonconformity; together with the advantages which arise from the communion and discipline of our churches. To show again that, though independent of each other as it respects the exercise and admission of authority, we are notwithstanding bound together by powerful ties, and that our principles are neither selfish nor exclusive, we shall point out the duties of christian churches to each other, their obligations to promote the good of the world, and the re-action of missionary enterprise abroad on the state of religion at home. Thus, what at first sight may appear theoretical, sectarian, and confined, will be proved to be practical in its tendency, liberal in its spirit, and fraught with the most benevolent dispositions to the interests of others and of the world at large.

Having given this brief outline of the general plan we have sketched, and which we hope, by the divine blessing, to be enabled to fill up, I must now advert more particularly to that division of the plan to which the present discourse is intended to be introductory. This part of our scheme embraces the evidences of revealed religion, or the various kinds of proof by which the divine origin of the Scriptures is established.

I trust I shall not be considered as invading the province of my successors, or as stepping beyond the boundary prescribed to myself, if I go a little into detail on the various heads which these evidences embrace; for I freely acknowledge, that I do not know how to represent the advantanges of an acquaintance with the evidences of revelation, without speaking of the evidences themselves; and I am persuaded that one of the most effectual representations of those advantages will be found in a comprehensive view of what they embrace. It shall be my object to be as brief as is consistent with perspicuity, and with due regard to those who are to follow.

The evidences of revelation have usually been divided into two branches, commonly designated the *external* and *internal*. This general division is sufficiently accurate and comprehensive for our present purpose; as, under different arrangements, it may easily be made to embrace every thing of moment relative to the subject of evidence. The two divisions are properly adapted to two different classes of persons. The former, that is the external, appeals to men who know and care nothing about the subject of revelation—the contents of the document presented; the latter, or the internal, implies a certain measure of acquaintance with the record itself. On the external testimony we make our stand in addressing the avowed infidels of the world; on the internal, we place our chief dependence in assailing the unbelief of the human heart, and in our appeals to the nominal and worldly professors of the faith of Christ.

It is obvious that the external ought to take precedence of the internal in these discussions; not that the one is subordinate in importance to the other; but because it naturally presents itself first to view, and

because, if there be any obvious flaw or deficiency in the external testimony, it is utterly impossible to supply that defect by any thing contained in the document itself. If the witnesses are found liars, or unaccredited as messengers of God, the matter of their testimony must be abandoned as indefensible. In other points of view, the internal evidence is of paramount importance. A man may fully understand and believe as far as the external argument goes, and yet neither know nor obey the truth. He may cease to be an infidel, without becoming a believer in the scriptural sense of the term. He may follow Lardner, and Campbell, and Paley, through all the steps of their powerful reasoning, and assent to their conclusions; while of christianity, as a message of reconciliation, he remains deplorably ignorant, and to its grand design, as a system of godliness, he continues irreconcilably adverse. It is far otherwise with the internal evidence, which cannot be understood without some knowledge of the truth itself, or be believed without some sense of its importance and its suitableness. It is calculated to convince the understanding, and at the same time to reach the heart. It is of vast importance to leave men inexcusable, and to convict them of unreasonableness and folly: but it is of far greater consequence to convert the soul from the error of its ways, and to cover the multitude of its sins.

Happily we are not under the necessity of placing the two classes of evidence in opposition or contrast. They perfectly harmonize in their design and tendency, and afford to each other mutual strength and corroboration. All the parts of the external testimony are intelligible to the genuine believer, and many parts of the internal can be made to bear on the understandings and the hearts of the most daring sceptics and

opposers. It is the duty and interest of every christian to be thoroughly conversant with both.

The two leading branches of the external department are Miracles and Prophecy. Under the former class fall to be considered the nature and possibility of miraculous agency and events in general, and the nature, possibility, and probability of those miracles recorded in the Scriptures, by which the divine mission of the prophets and apostles was accredited. On these points the works of Campbell and Farmer are invaluable, and require no eulogy from me.

The consideration of the miracles recorded in the Old and New Testaments, necessarily involves the examination of the testimony which contains those miracles, and of the chain of historical evidence by which the original account has been brought down through the long succession of ages to us. "The original bearers of the message were beings like ourselves, and we can apply our experience of man to their conduct and their testimony. Had they the manner and physiognomy of honest men? Was their testimony resisted, and did they persevere in it? Had they any interest in fabricating the message; or did they suffer in consequence of this perseverance? Did they suffer in such a degree as to constitute a satisfying pledge of their integrity? Was there more than one messenger, —and did they agree as to the substance of that communication they made to the world? Did they exhibit any special mark of their office as the messengers of God—such a mark as none but God could give, and none but his approved messengers could obtain possession of? Was this mark the power of working miracles, — and were these miracles so obviously addressed to the senses, as to leave no suspicion of deceit behind them? These are questions which we find ourselves

competent to take up and decide upon,"* and which we can most satisfactorily decide in the affirmative.

When satisfied with the credibility of the original and divinely appointed witnesses of christianity, we naturally proceed to consider the kind of evidence by which the authenticity and correctness of the document in which their testimony is recorded, may be ascertained. This becomes a question both of criticism and of history. We call in the aid of both, and find that they powerfully confirm and illustrate each other. We are furnished with a continued and unbroken chain of testimonies by the friends of christianity, from the earliest period of its existence to the present day. And from the mouths and pens of its adversaries, we extract decisive proofs, that the books of the New Testament, are in all important respects—indeed we might almost say, *verbatim et literatim*—the same now that they were in the first century.

The researches of criticism and philology come in aid of the same conclusion. Manuscripts of the whole or greater part of the New Testament, of great antiquity, still exist; translations of it into various languages, which began to be made even in apostolic times, still remain; its phraseology and structure, its idioms and allusions, all sustain its claims, and establish its birth-place and its age. It is not more certain that Cæsar wrote his Commentaries, or Virgil his Æneid, than it is that Matthew and John and Luke and Paul were the writers of the New Testament. We have not more satisfactory evidence that the former were Romans, and wrote in Latin,—the one what he saw and did, the other the creations of his fancy,—than we have that the latter were Hebrews, and wrote

* Chalmers.

in Greek, what they saw, and felt, and handled of the word of life. To be consistent, the person who rejects the authenticity of the books of the New Testament, ought to reject all ancient history, and all human testimony, and believe only what comes under his own observation.

When these points have been determined, there is still another kind of external evidence by which the religion of Jesus may be tried. The record of it contains predictions of many most important events; some of which were to be accomplished shortly after they had been committed to writing, and others of them in a far distant futurity. If the predictions of the events which were soon to happen should be regarded as only shrewd and happy conjectures, it will be impossible to apply this description to those which are taking place now, and which are destined to occur in succession to the end of time. But even of the first series of scripture prophecies it will be impossible to form the low opinion we have adverted to, when their nature is fully examined.

The divine Author of Christianity foretold his own death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven; together with the opposition his cause should experience, its triumph over that opposition, and the destruction of his deadly enemies the Jews. An impostor never would have rested his claims on such proofs; or, if he had, discomfiture must have followed. The Apostles foretold the rise, progress, and completion of a most horrid corruption of the system which they propagated. They predicted also the overthrow, at the distance of many ages, of that apostacy, and the restoration of the religion of Jesus to its pristine purity, and more than its primitive glory. Of the accomplishment of many, indeed of the greater

number of these predictions, we are capable of judging. Their fulfilment has been recorded, not by the interested followers and partial friends of Christ, but by the impartial, unintentional, and often hostile pen of history. The supernatural and miraculously accredited testimony of the primitive æra, has been supported and reiterated in every age, by the voice of a continued providence. The rise and fall of empires; the revolutions of states; the declension and revival of science, literature and religion; the progress of art, of public opinion, of discovery and of liberty, have all a relation, not only to the interests of the kingdom of Christ; but to the evidence that it was set up, and has been continually preserved, by the God of heaven.

The other great division of evidence has been usually denominated *the internal*, which opens a wide and most interesting field of argument and illustration. Two distinct views may be taken of this department. It may be viewed as embracing, chiefly, the marks or proofs furnished by the Bible itself, of its genuineness and authenticity; that is, that it was written at the time and by the persons to which it is usually ascribed; and that the occurrences and events which it describes actually took place. Those who wish to ascertain how much can be done in this way, are referred to the admirable work of Paley, the Horæ Paulinæ, in which, without travelling out of the record itself—the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of Paul—he establishes, by a series of indirect arguments and incidental notices, the truth of a great part of the New Testament.

But another view is usually taken of the internal evidence, of far more importance, and more generally intelligible. It is alleged, that the Bible contains in

itself the most decisive existence of its heavenly origin, in the views which it furnishes of the infinitely glorious character of God as the moral governor of the universe; in its representations of the present state and circumstances of human nature; in the powerful remedy it reveals for the deliverance of guilty creatures; in the universal adaptation of that remedy to all to whom it is addressed, and who are led to receive it; in the high moral tendency of its doctrines and precepts; and in the fitness of the whole system to lead to holiness, happiness, and God. In these respects it bears the image and superscription of divinity. It reveals what God alone could disclose, with a perfection of which God alone could be the author. It unveils the glory of the invisible Creator, and presents him before his creatures robed in all the beauty of holiness, and invested with all the charms of love. It brings him near without lowering him; it clothes him with condescension without degrading him; and it enthrones him in majesty without surrounding him with terror.

Its representations of our state, as the creatures of the divine government, are not more awful than we feel them to be just. It enters into the heart, and exposes its most secret evils and springs of iniquity. It thus affords undeniable proof that its darkest recesses are naked and open to the Author of the exposition. We find it impossible to dispute its statements respecting our guilt and its desert; and equally impossible to doubt that all our misery is the result of our apostacy and rebellion. One thing constitutes our bane, and one antidote alone is suited to destroy it. Sin is the cause of sorrow and of death; in God the help must be found. Without a return to him, in a way honourable to his government and suited to our circumstances, the curse can never be removed.

This way of return, the gospel reveals. The divine provision of mercy, through the atonement of the Son of God, is the grand discovery of christianity. This discovery at once brings into view, and perfectly harmonizes all the attributes of God. Here justice asserts all its claims and receives all its due — holiness appears in its purest lustre—faithfulness in its most encouraging aspects — while love beams with all its tenderness, and mercy shines forth with most engaging attractions. Here God and man are once more reconciled; the former by the removal of the cause of displeasure, the latter by the destruction of his enmity. "God is by Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing to men their trespasses."

The adaptation of this heaven-devised cure is felt by all who receive it. In the God of love, the sinner finds his best and his only effectual friend. In his revealed character, he feels the attraction which draws, and the pattern of excellence which excites him. Here he obtains relief from the sense of guilt, and from the fear of punishment; while he experiences, in the object of his contemplation, an absorbing and transforming power, which withdraws him from evil, and unites him to what is good. He discovers at once the secret of his misery and his restlessness, and the source of all that is pure in enjoyment, sublime in expectation, and powerful in efficiency. In the gospel he finds all that he needs as a sinner, all that he wants as a creature, and all that he can enjoy on this side eternity. He "rejoices, therefore, with joy unspeakable and full of glory."—"Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, he is changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Lord the Spirit."

It is thus that christianity makes its appeal to the understanding and the conscience, to the feelings and

the wants, to the hopes and the fears of man. It is thus it carries its own witness along with it. It bears on its bosom a message of mercy to every creature, it furnishes a cure for every evil, and provides an antidote for every sorrow. It finds, in the nature and circumstances of man all over the globe, a ground for its grand appeal; and that appeal can never be made altogether in vain. Wherever it finds a human creature possessed of rationality, it addresses him in language which he may understand, on a subject too important to be altogether despised. Wherever it finds a sinner, it finds a man who needs the blessing which it brings, and to whom that blessing is free and suitable. And wherever it finds a subject of misery, let that misery arise from what it may, and exist in whatever degree, it announces tidings which, if believed, must infallibly relieve it. The testimony to which these things are applicable must be from God, and not of men.

Thus, by combining the external and internal evidence together, we are furnished with a mass of proof of the most solid and appropriate nature; worthy of the great subject to which it relates, and of the source whence it springs; affording supreme satisfaction and delight to the believer, and justifying the unlimited confidence he reposes in it: but involving consequences of the most solemn and tremendous description to the man who wantonly despises, or deliberately rejects it.

The best apology I can offer for dwelling so long on the evidences themselves, is, that it will both facilitate and abridge my statement of the advantages arising from an extensive acquaintance with them. Even the slightest attention to what has been brought forward, must convince every intelligent individual of

the vast importance of studying the extensive and diversified proofs, that the Scriptures are a revelation from God. No inquiry can have more powerful claims upon us, and in no inquiry can we engage with so great a prospect of advantage. He who neglects to institute it, or who goes about it in a careless manner, or in a speculative humour, does injustice to himself, affronts the truth and authority of God, and acts a part as foolish, and unreasonable, as it is criminal and dangerous. Whatever presents a claim to be a revelation from God, is entitled to be heard; and a book which possesses such claims as the Bible, the rejection or reception of which brings such consequences along with it, ought to be examined with the utmost seriousness and candour.

Considered as the means of *intellectual* improvement, I know not a more important exercise in which any person can engage, than the examination of the arguments in support of the truth of christianity. Were the conductors of schools and academies to direct the attention of their pupils to this subject, instead of some of the trivial or less important matters which frequently occupy much of their time, I have no doubt that great benefit would accrue from it. Not that I would recommend their putting into the hands of young persons books containing the strength of the infidel cause, that they may find answers to them. This would be injudicious. But with great safety might they put into their hands some of the best works in support and illustration of the christian scheme; and direct them to a course of reading, by which they would be gradually fitted for understanding the whole subject, and enabled to perceive the breadth and the depth of the foundations on which the entire edifice of christianity rests.

This investigation would sharpen their acuteness and stimulate their improvement. It would lead them to examine the different kinds of testimony and evidence;—to discriminate the pretensions of imposture from the claims of truth;—to appreciate the value of solid argument, and to scorn the wickedness of misrepresentation, and the impiety of levity and jesting on sacred subjects. It would induce a love of truth, a reverence for its claims, a hallowed regard to its authority, with a hatred of every thing opposed to integrity and honour, which might form the basis of moral habits of the most important description.

It would be impossible to promote this acquaintance with the evidences of revelation without extending the range of their general knowledge. An uninformed or ignorant person is not capable of estimating the full strength of the christian cause. It supposes an acquaintance with many subjects, if its full amount is to be ascertained. History, criticism, science, and experience in argument, all furnish their aid in this important inquiry, and contribute their respective quotas to confirm or elucidate the claims of the word of God. Even an acquaintance with the opposition it has encountered, and over which it has triumphed, tends powerfully to confirm the mind in its truth and divinity.

Revelation has been assailed by adversaries of no ordinary character. All that learning could discover, all that eloquence could allege, and all that wit, sophistry and cunning could contrive and assert, have been employed to injure the christian cause. But these things have only called forth the most splendid talents on the side of that cause. The most powerful productions of human genius and industry have been furnished by the advocates of christianity; and in this interesting

field of labour some of the most exquisite intellectual repasts are to be found. In profound and masterly argument, we have nothing to compare with "the Analogy" of Butler, and the Defence of Miracles by Campbell. In laborious, patient, and candid research, the world has furnished nothing superior to the works of Lardner. In luminous and unanswerable reasonings, where is the volume that will admit of comparison with Paley? These are the mighty masters in the school of argument and philosophy: but the time would fail to enumerate the names and do justice to the labours of Cudworth, and Baxter, and Newton, and Locke, and Leland, and Addison, and Chandler, and Littleton, and West, and Watson, and Hailes, and Porteus, and Jenyns, and Chalmers, and Haldane, and Erskine, and Mearns, and Bogue, and Beattie, and Gregory. In the writings of these, and many others that might be mentioned, the ablest defences of the truth are to be found. The man who is unacquainted with them has yet much to learn, and much enjoyment of an intellectual nature to acquire: while he who knows them, and can yet treat with levity the cause which they advocate, has much to answer for at the bar of God.

But intellectual gratification and improvement, however important in themselves, are only to be ranked among the subordinate advantages of an extensive acquaintance with christian evidence. Its *moral advantages* are of a far higher order, and prefer still greater claims to our consideration. Were christianity addressed to our speculative faculties only, we should be justified in treating it as we do other speculations. But it is addressed to man chiefly as a lapsed and ruined creature. Its object is not so much to gratify his curiosity, as to restore and renovate his

nature. It comes as a remedy, and not merely as a fact or proposition: so that if it does not prove the savour of life, it will doubtless prove the savour of death to those who hear it. If it be true as a religious dispensation, it is exclusively true. If there is salvation in the name which it reveals, there is no other name by which men can be saved. If eternal life be the result of believing it, eternal damnation must be the consequence of rejecting it. The mere examination of the evidence of such a subject ought not therefore to be a matter of indifference or of mere speculation: it must bring good or evil along with it.

From the outline of the evidences sketched in this discourse, it appears that those evidences cannot be fully entered into without a considerable acquaintance with the matter and substance of revelation itself; and this I conceive to be one source of the moral advantage of studying those evidences. We cannot do justice to them without studying the Bible; and it is impossible to study the Bible in a serious temper of mind without being the better for it. God, in his perfect wisdom, has so constructed his word, that we cannot examine it closely, with a view to ascertain any one point, without having its leading subjects constantly pressed on our attention. The moral glory of the divine character; the holiness, justice, and goodness of the law; the infinite benevolence and appropriateness of the gospel; the deplorable condition of the sinner; the safety and blessedness of the christian; the emptiness of the world, and the eternal weight of glory which is to be revealed; continually present themselves when examining the Bible, either from mere curiosity, or from the desire of ascertaining its claims, acknowledging its authority, or discovering its meaning.

Such a range of subjects, embracing every topic bearing directly on the salvation of man, must produce some considerable influence and impression on the mind of the inquirer. Their importance, their grandeur, and their adaptation to his wants and circumstances must be, in some degree, felt.

Other subjects, also, belonging to the evidence, though less closely connected with salvation, necessarily lead the soul to God. It is impossible, for instance, to examine the prophecies of the Old Testament, with their recorded fulfilment in the New, without having the mind affected by the various parts of the divine character which are thus illustrated. The predictions relative to a Saviour, show what was the grand object in the divine mind from eternity—the redemption of a lost world. They demonstrate that, notwithstanding its rebellion and profligacy, God's thoughts towards it, were invariably thoughts of peace, and not of wrath. The predicted character of the Saviour shows the magnitude and difficulty of the undertaking, and must lead the mind to reflect on the nature and extent of the evil which rendered such an expedient of deliverance necessary. His foretold sufferings show the method through which redemption was contemplated from the beginning, and harmonize with the symbolical rites of the Patriarchal and Levitical institutes. In the minuteness of the prophetic detail, respecting the time and place of his birth; his parentage and family; his circumstances and treatment in the world; his sufferings, and death, and glorification; we recognize the infinite wisdom of God in providing against the possibility of an impostor sustaining the character of the Messiah. When all these things are examined along with the New Testament history, and the perfect correspondence which obtains

between the prophecies, and the character and work of Jesus of Nazareth, is ascertained, we arrive, not only at a full conviction that he is indeed the Christ, but have a most powerful and salutary impression produced upon the mind by this display of the wisdom, the faithfulness, and the goodness of God.

In examining the miracles of Scripture, too, especially those wrought by our Lord Jesus Christ, we cannot overlook the moral principles which they were designed to illustrate. His miracles were never unnecessary or ostentatious displays of power; they were never wrought to gratify an idle curiosity, or in compliance with importunate demands for satisfaction. Nor were they ever performed with the mere design of establishing his claims, and refuting the calumnies of his enemies. They were always wrought in connexion with the highest and most important end—the good of those who were the subjects or witnesses of them. They were all miracles of benevolence; and thus they perfectly harmonized with the nature and genius of christianity, as a dispensation of love, and not of judgment. They illustrate the character, as well as the claims, of the Redeemer; and prove him in every sense to have been the friend of sinners. While we dwell on the greatness of Him whom the winds and the seas obeyed, and at whose voice the dead came forth; we cannot overlook the infinite condescension and tenderness, which regarded the fears of the disciples, pitied the sorrows of the widow, and wept at the grave of Lazarus. While we admire the hand which performed the wonders, we adore the heart which dictated its mighty operations. One view of the miracles of Jesus produces the exclamation of Peter, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Another view of them

extorts the exclamation, "Thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel."

Thus every part of this subject leads to the works and the ways of God. These will ever be found most worthy of himself, and never fail to effect on the serious mind the most valuable impressions. The subjects of revelation, and the proofs that it is from God, are so interwoven that they cannot be separated. The individual most conversant with the Bible will invariably be found the most deeply and thoroughly convinced of its truth.

While the examination of the Scriptures and of their evidences tends to produce a moral impression on the mind, *a certain state of moral disposition* is necessary to the clear and full perception of their heavenly nature and origin. A serious inquirer will not proceed many stages in the progress of discovery, without finding that his advancement very much corresponds with the condition of his moral and spiritual feelings. On every page of the sacred record it is inscribed, "If any man incline to do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God,"—"then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord." If the disposition be wanting to receive and approve the truth, to obey its dictates and choose its promises,—if the object be to find occasion against it, material to justify ungodliness, or food for a prurient or misguided fancy, — let such a one beware how he proceeds. There are tests and stumbling-blocks, which will expose him to imminent hazard. As the righteous punishment of his unhallowed dispositions, "seeing he may be left to see, yet not perceive; hearing he may hear, and yet not understand; lest he should see with his eyes, and hear with his ears, and understand with his heart, and be converted and

healed." If there is not in him "the love of the truth, that he may be saved," he may be given over to strong delusion to believe a lie, "that he may be damned for not believing the truth, but having pleasure in unrighteousness."

On the other hand, the greatest encouragement is held out to the humble, patient, and sincere learner. To him "the Father of lights" has promised the spirit of wisdom and revelation, to guide him into all truth; to assist the weakness of his understanding, and to correct the waywardness of his heart. As he advances in the inquiry, he will find his difficulties one after another giving way; his convictions of the truth growing in strength and precision; his perceptions of its moral glory and suitableness becoming more and more powerful and distinct; till at length "in the light of God he sees light clearly," and in the joy of God is enabled greatly to rejoice.

There is an evident fitness in thus connecting the knowledge of the evidence and the meaning of the word of God with a certain condition of our moral faculties and dispositions. Sin is that disease of our nature, of which the word of God reveals the cure. It is highly proper, therefore, that the man who cherishes and fosters the disease, and who encourages prejudices against the grand remedy, and its infinitely benevolent author, should be left to experience the consequence of his conduct, by eating of the fruit of his own devices. It would be as reasonable to expect that a man, with morbid taste and jaundiced eye, should relish what is exquisite in food, and beautiful in colour, as that the lover of sin should see the glory of the truth as it is in Jesus. There must be some affinity between the object and the mind which is directed to it. The beauty of that Word which is the

transcript of the divine nature, which exhibits all that is perfect in moral excellence, all that is compassionate in sovereign kindness, and all that is transporting in the prospects of eternity, can be seen only by the man whose heart God has touched, and who is taught not by flesh and blood, but by our Father who is in heaven.

This holy influence is one of the most important promises of that revelation of which we are speaking, and one of the greatest encouragements to the conscientious inquirer. Would you then be grounded and settled in the truth, the teaching of the heavenly Spirit you must implore. On his teaching you must depend, rather than upon mere human labour and research. You must be faithful to your convictions, and follow up your discoveries to their practical conclusions. You must seek to grow in grace, as you grow in knowledge. If you desire an extensive acquaintance with the evidences of religion, you must be careful to live and act as religious persons, and to do justice to the measure of religious light which you have received. You must beware of sacrificing duty to convenience and inclination. You may as well abandon the examination at once, as think of persevering in it and hoping for success, if in heart and conduct you continue to resist the admonitions of the sacred Word. Whatever tends thus to establish the connexion between truth and character, evidence and moral disposition, must be of vast importance to reasonable and accountable creatures.

But passing all other advantages arising from an extensive acquaintance with the evidences of the truth, let me direct your attention to the vast importance of it, *in order to our safety, usefulness, and comfort as christians.* These are the great objects for which God

has furnished us with such abundance and variety of testimony to the truth of his own word. These are the grand design and end of the whole. Without a perception of the evidence in some of its forms, what is faith? Credulity.—What is confidence? Temerity.—What is hope? Presumption.—What is zeal? Fanaticism.—What is comfort? Delusion.—What, in short, is religion? Not the reasonable service which it ought to be, and which it must be, in order to its being acceptable to God, and profitable to ourselves. It is no better than an unmeaning form—a worthless profession—the thing of custom, tradition, or fancy, instead of a faith and service, the result of painful examination, personal conviction, and enlightened attachment.

It is exceedingly distressing to reflect on the extent to which many are disposed to take their religion on trust. They are Christians for little better reason than they would have been Mahommedans had they been born in Turkey, or worshippers of the Grand Lama had their lot been cast in Thibet. "They so believe, because they so were bred." Such persons would never think of acting in this manner in regard to any worldly affair of importance. They would not trust the most trifling interests of time on so slender and flimsy a foundation. Yet without inquiry, without evidence, (for evidence unperceived or not understood is the same to the individual as though it did not exist,) they yield their faith and trust their immortal hopes. Of what greater folly is it possible for rational creatures to be guilty?

Even in many cases in which there is greater concern and seriousness, it is to be feared, the inquiry is not carried far enough. The faith of many serious persons rests too much on the testimony of man, and

too little on the perception of the power and wisdom of God. It is too much taken for granted that so many wise and good people must be right,—that what we have received by tradition from our fathers, is generally received in the country, and taught from the pulpit, cannot be wrong. All these things must be allowed to operate in the first stages of religious belief and inquiry. They are attended with injury, only when they are substituted in the place of personal examination, and suspend the farther and more complete investigation of the subject. In numerous instances they are the chief reasons of belief, and thus destroy those feelings of a personal nature, which are so essential to our comfort and efficiency as christians.

The consequences resulting from this ignorance and indifference to the evidence of the truth, are most melancholy and disastrous. The faith of such persons cannot bear even the slightest shock. It is only necessary to bring them into contact with some would-be philosopher, or witling infidel, to have the foundations, if such they may be called, of their religious system completely torn up. The latent unbelief of the human heart is ignited by the first spark of infidelity, and the outward profession founded upon it is exploded immediately. Had it not been for this lamentable ignorance and indifference on the subject of religion and its truth, which pervaded both the upper and lower classes of society during the latter part of the last century, would the writings of Hume and Payne have produced such ravages as they did? Certainly not. These bold and impudent infidels had not to contend with the faith of the gospel, but with a base substitute and pretender which had usurped its place. If they succeeded in overthrowing the faith of some, it was that faith which consisted in pretence and semblance,

or which never had its foundation on the testimony of God. Who, that knows that testimony, and has felt its delightful and transforming influence, would have been cheated out of his religion by the sophistry of Hume, or laughed out of it by the wit of Voltaire, or bullied out of it by the boisterous rudeness of Payne? The attacks of these apostles of falsehood, these panders to vice, these enemies of human happiness, only attach the genuine christian more strongly to the great foundation of his hope, and lead him to exclaim with greater emphasis, "Lord, to whom can we go? thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe, and are sure, that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

It is very disgraceful to any man, professing christianity, to be unable to meet the objections to his faith among persons in his own class and circumstances in society. Such a man injures very deeply the cause to which he professes to be a friend. He is unable to give a reason of the hope which is in him, or to assign the grounds of his religious faith and practice. His inability is construed into the weakness of the cause which he has espoused. Because he cannot defend his religion, it is inferred that it cannot be defended. He is regarded as a specimen of the people called Christians. The body to which he nominally belongs are denounced as fools, or bigots, or fanatics, and christianity is regarded incapable or unworthy of defence.

Every christian is required by his religion to be a propagator of it in the world. He is expected to use all his endeavours and all his influence to recommend to others the salvation which he has himself received. How can he acquit himself in the discharge of this duty, the next in importance to seeking the salvation

of his own soul, if he is not familiar with the best mode of arguing and defending the Redeemer's cause? If he does not study to become acquainted with the strong grounds on which the Scriptures rest their claims, he cannot make those bold and fearless appeals to others, which he might otherwise make with the happiest effect. What an advantage has the enlightened christian, when meeting the unhappy individuals, who, sometimes from fear, sometimes from shame, sometimes from mere levity, have been induced to surrender themselves into the hands of those who are continually prowling about to destroy unwary souls! A single remark, judiciously made, will sometimes prostrate to the dust the whole strength of the infidel cause, and may call forth a train of reflections in some of its abettors, which, by the blessing of God, may lead them to the truth. It is well that we have public and professional defenders of the faith; but the vigour and success of the christian army ought not to rest on them. Every christian ought to be able to meet his enemy, and to contribute his portion in gaining the battles of his Lord.

Our comfort, no less than our efficiency, depends on our knowledge of the evidences of the truth. Christian enjoyment has too often been considered as almost entirely the result of divine sovereignty and spiritual influence. It has been too much derived from insulated intimations, choice promises, and detached fragments of the word of God. The alternations of hope and fear, comfort and despondency, have been supposed to depend entirely on causes over which we have no controul. I am far from insinuating that all this is founded on mistake; and yet I am convinced that important mistakes are connected with these views. It is true, they seem to ascribe glory to God, and to

indicate a proper sense of dependence upon him. But it is submitted that they disregard, in some degree, the means which God has put in our power, and our accountableness for the use which we make of those means. They overlook the fact, that sovereignty is not caprice; that it operates according to certain principles or laws which God has revealed in his word; and that we have duties to perform as well as privileges to enjoy.

For what purpose has God given us a clear and connected revelation of his character and will, but that we may examine it attentively, and be thoroughly conversant with all its contents? Why has he furnished us with all sorts of evidence in its support, but that we may digest and feel the full force of that evidence? Is it reasonable to expect, that our obedience will be acceptable, that our comfort will be full, that our hope will be strong and permanent, if these things be neglected? As well may the husbandman expect an abundant crop, while he neglects to prepare the soil and to cast in the seed, amusing himself with speculations on the uncertainty of the weather, and the sovereignty of God in regard to the influence of the sun and the rain; as the christian look for solid and lasting comfort in the faith and hope of the gospel, while he neglects the means by which alone they can be obtained.

The enjoyment which springs from an enlightened acquaintance with the great scheme of redemption, and from an extensive knowledge of its grand and overpowering evidence, is of the purest and sublimest order. In that divinely accredited scheme, we perceive the infinite love of God pouring forth its exhaustless stores to effect the deliverance and happiness of the world:—providing a Saviour, revealing his character,

accepting his work, and attesting his claims: — appointing an order of means suited to the nature of the plan and the condition of the objects proposed to be benefited by it: — connecting with those means a system of effective influence to insure their success, and to carry forward the design: — and encouraging all who believe, to labour actively, and suffer patiently, by the promise of an inheritance of imperishable glory. To have the full satisfaction that all this is the truth of God which cannot lie, the work of God which cannot fail, the engagement of God which cannot disappoint, must afford to the heirs of salvation, who have fled to lay hold on the hope set before them, strong and everlasting consolation. The floods of tribulation may swell around, and threaten to ingulph them; but their anchor will hold fast, being fixed within the veil. The world may seek to ensnare and allure them; but its honours and pleasures will have no glory in their estimation, by reason of the glory which so far excelleth. The workings of unbelief may occasionally darken and bewilder their minds, and endanger their peace; but the word and oath of God, confirmed by the sacrifice of his Son, when again contemplated, will restore confidence and re-invigorate the life of godliness. The darts of Satan may fly thick, and both annoy and wound; but the shield of faith, formed by the testimony of God, will at length successfully repel them all. Bodily strength may decay, mental vigour may decrease, death may approach, clothed in all its terrors; but the deathless principle of God's implanting, fed by the means of his own appointment, and nourished by the selectest influences of his Spirit, will even in those circumstances increase in strength, and evince its unearthly nature and origin. It will resist the progress of time,

the effects of disease, and the fear of death. It will pass unhurt through the dark and cheerless valley, survive the dissolution of nature, smile over the ruins of the universe, and reign and triumph in immortality.

My respected fathers and brethren in the ministry, I have thus endeavoured to discharge, though in a most imperfect manner, the duty devolved upon me; by laying before you a general view of our whole plan, and some of the most obvious advantages of an enlarged and connected view of the evidences of the word of God. By the kind providence of God, we have been permitted to begin this new course, and are all in the enjoyment of a tolerable measure of health and comfort. But who can look forward, through the period of three years to which the course extends, without anticipating that we shall not all live to see its close? If it is not probable that all the ministers will survive, it is certain that many of the members of these congregations will, long ere the Lectures have been completed, have finished their course, and gone to give in their account. How solemn and affecting the thought!

It is our happiness, whatever may befal, that we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we have made known to others the power and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we have not been eye-witnesses of his glory and majesty, we trust we can say, "we know in whom we believe;" and that we have believed, not because of the saying of others, but from what we have ourselves heard and seen, and tasted, and handled of the word of life. We know that the foundation of God standeth sure; and, having tried its strength and solidity ourselves, we desire to recommend it to others. Let us not shun to declare the whole counsel of God. Let us keep back nothing

that may be profitable. Let us study to show ourselves approved unto God, as workmen, that need not be ashamed. Let us labour to convince every man's judgment, and to impress every man's heart, that we may have a testimony in the conscience of all our hearers, and that we may at last present every man faultless before God. Let the thought of being soon or suddenly called to give in our account increase our diligence and our fidelity, that at length we may give in that account with joy, and not with grief, as that would be unprofitable for us.

The truth and moment of that salvation, the evidences of which we purpose fully to consider, require that I should appeal to every individual in this assembly, whether he has yet received it. In the wondrous kindness of God, salvation has not only been provided, but brought near to you. It is addressed to all; it is suited to all; and its richest blessings are free for the use of all who believe. The evidence on which it rests may be slighted by the trifling, opposed by the profligate, and kept out of view by the lover of iniquity; but it will approve itself to every ingenuous mind, and satisfy all who are in earnest about the interests of eternity. It is too plain to be misunderstood even by the wayfaring man, who inquires the way to Zion. Its strength and clearness are such as to leave the rejecter of the gospel entirely without excuse: while the importance of the subject is such as to leave the folly as well as the guilt of the man, who despises it, utterly beyond description. "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record which

God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things are written that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."—1 *John* v. 9—13.

LECTURE II.

THE DIVINE LEGATION OF MOSES; AND THE LEADING FEATURES OF THE MOSAIC ECONOMY.

By WILLIAM BENGO' COLLYER, D.D. LL.D. F.A.S. &c.

LECTURE II.

THE DIVINE LEGATION OF MOSES; AND THE LEADING FEATURES OF THE MOSAIC ECONOMY.

LUKE xvi. 31.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

THIS is the language of Him who is the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. If he be not the Way, there is no access to the Majesty of Heaven. If he be not the Truth, inextricable error broods upon the world through its successive generations. If he be not the Life, eternal death is the hopeless and final destiny of Man.

The subject proposed for discussion this day is, '*The Divine Legation of Moses; and the leading features of the Mosaic Economy.*" And the text selected would appear to set it at rest: for, although it is a parable, and the words read are put into the mouth of Abraham, it illustrates the recognised principles of the ancient church, and, above all, speaks the sentiments of Jesus Christ himself.

Looking at the scope of the plan of these Lectures, as embracing the external and the internal evidences

of revelation,—and thence inferring the character and modes of christian communion,—some previous inquiries suggest themselves which demand to be noticed, although it is not necessary to pursue them into detail, and they are evidently assumed in this scheme of theological disquisition.

First, whether there be a Revelation at all? or, is it necessary that there should be a distinct revelation of the divine will? For, if the necessity be established, there can scarcely remain any doubt as to the grant. Even Deism, professing to derive its knowledge of God exclusively from the visible creation, and from the deductions of reason thence proceeding, concludes, from the allowed perfections of Deity, that nothing absolutely necessary to his creatures can be lacking. The voice of the whole creation—the history of all ages—the record of man under all the modification of his circumstances, answer this question. The researches of ancient philosophy, stretched abroad to the four quarters of the heavens, and especially attracted by the East, the common fountain of intelligence, settled down at last upon the melancholy conviction, that certainty upon the most awful and interesting subjects was not to be obtained. Some, therefore, were content to resign themselves to the horrible domination of universal scepticism; and, because they had missed what they sought, concluded that nothing was to be known. Others, more rationally, and in a better temper, inferred, that discoveries not yet made awaited the world—inferred, from existing traditions some clearer revelation—inferred, a divine teacher, whose intelligence should scatter the clouds which had gathered around them, and waited "until the day should break and the shadows flee away." These "prisoners of hope," were found among the most

distinguished intellects, and the most brilliant spirits of the times in which they respectively lived; and at the head of them all stood Socrates, a name consecrated by the veneration of ages, who distinctly avowed his expectations of such a teacher, and ardently expressed his wishes that he might arise in his day. These are the concessions of nature, and of right reason, to the necessity of an immediate and distinct revelation of the divine will, elicited by the acknowledged limitation of our faculties, and the otherwise hopeless, helpless condition of society. Out of this recognised principle, which in the teeth of Deism establishes itself upon the fact of attempted impositions,—every legislator pretending to a divine communication, because every legislator felt the necessity of something more than merely human sanctions, to give force and efficacy to his laws,—arises another important inquiry:

Secondly, among various pretensions, which is the Divine Revelation? We have called the Bible "*The Book*," by way of distinction and pre-eminence; but other religions besides christianity have their book,—their prejudices in its favour, their arguments in its support, their proselytes, adherents, and martyrs. How shall this question be decided? By a fair comparison, and a faithful testimony. If in these there shall be found nothing out of the reach of reason, which is not evidently borrowed from the inspired writers; if in these there shall be found, commingled with so much of truth as they contain, concessions to human prejudices and passions—the pretended revelation becoming a pander to the lusts and corruptions of the depraved heart of man; if power, ambition, vice, cruelty, shall be sanctioned, flattered, indulged, excited—and what false religion, from Indus to the Pole—what pretended revelation in any age, has not done all this?—if the

christian volume stands alone in unappeasable hostility against vice, in principle and in detail—whether prosperous in high places, or shrinking into the sordid retreats of poverty—whether openly avowed, or secretly practised—therefore encountering predominant prejudices, and fearlessly scattering rebukes, always consistent and always unsparing; if to this superhuman firmness it add the sanction of new motives, the development of undiscovered principles, the establishment of perfect and inflexible laws; if it display the dawn of an eternal morning breaking even upon the sepulchre—not the dazzling coruscations of fancy playing over the darkness of nature, but the shining light which distinctly defines whatever falls within the present horizon of mortal vision, and clearly demonstrates infinity beyond, in the depths of unexplored futurity;—the comparison is at an end, and nothing remains but contrast. Zoroaster, Confucius, Menu, Mohammed, every name yields to Jesus; every pretence to his claims—every effort of human wisdom and philosophy—vanishes away, and The Book remains unrivalled and triumphant.

These points are assumed in the present course of discussion, which opens by directing the attention of all men, but especially of the young, that they may "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh them a reason of the hope which is in them," to "the advantages of an enlarged *acquaintance* with the evidences of revelation;" and the present inquiry regards the Pentateuch—whether Moses can lay claim to inspiration? and, to drop the technical term of divine legation, whether he was appointed of God to do what he did, and instructed to say what he said?—Whether, in a word, the five opening books of the Bible be a divine revelation? and, if so, what are

the distinguishing characteristics of this particular dispensation? So I understand the subject; and there must be some fixed and recognised principles of demonstration.

When St. Paul vindicated the authority of his ministry among the Corinthians against those supercilious and presumptuous teachers who opposed him, he said, "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you, in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." He advanced no pretensions to an extraordinary commission, which he did not justify by supernatural powers, in addition to those silent and convincing demonstrations of undaunted courage, and unwavering perseverance. We unhesitatingly apply, in like manner, not merely general, but specific rules to the examination of claims to inspiration, and particularly to the pretensions of the Pentateuch. We shall demand of Moses that he produce the signs of a legate sent from God. Before the distinct employment of these principles, it is necessary plainly to state them. They are these:

First, That what a book professedly inspired says, should be demonstrably true: demonstrably, as to the fact, although, perhaps, unaccountable as to mode and subsistence, for reasons hereafter to be assigned. It should either possess such internal marks of evidence as shall command conviction, in the absence of collateral and contemporary testimony; or it should receive such corroboration as existing records can furnish. We mean not to shrink from this test in reference to the Pentateuch.

Secondly, That its subjects should lie beyond the grasp of human research. For what necessity could there be for a revelation of that which is either palpable in itself, or to be elicited by human intelligence,

thought, and industry? But if there be awful subjects of contemplation connected with our being, our origin, our relation to God, our final destiny;—if these subjects, of the most tremendous importance, have always escaped the most profound investigations and the most anxious inquiries, instituted in every age, and pressed to every possible extent; if from their very nature they lie beyond the confines of merely human intelligence,---then are they, for that very reason, the legitimate subjects of revelation, and no book, professing to be inspired, could leave them untouched, or fail to make them the first objects of its authoritative instructions. But it will follow, from the very nature of these subjects,—from the circumstance that they are above human capacity, from the fact that no uninspired man has known them, or could know them,—that they will be hard to be understood,—that they can be capable of only partial elucidation from things known, visible, and temporal,—that our intellectual faculties must be stretched to their utmost pitch, and return at last, wearied, to repose upon a testimony sufficient as to a truth, which in itself is unsearchable, because infinite. And *that*, therefore, which is commonly objected against the Bible (its obscurity) is, in truth, profundity, which we have no plummet to fathom,—infinity, which we have no wing to explore,---openings into eternity, and light poured through the deeps of heaven, which we have no strength of vision to follow or to endure. And if such be our necessary limitation of comprehension, and such the necessary infiniteness of the subjects of revelation, it will follow that we must meet with doctrines incapable of explanation, however clearly revealed;—that we ought to be satisfied with evidence relating to facts, for which we can assign no reason;—that our rule of judgment is unequal to measure the line of inspiration, and that principles applying on ordinary occasions will not always apply to extraordinary and supernatural subjects and events,---not from any opposition between them, but from the natural and necessary inadequacy of the one to embrace and develope the other. And while the general test of inspiration shall be applied to the Pentateuch; I shall require the concession and the recollection of this undeniable position.

Thirdly, That supernatural claims should be supported by superhuman powers and operations. I have no evidence of primary revelation but that which is furnished by miracle and prophecy: the one a sight confessedly beyond the reach of human intelligence; the other a force evidently beyond the effort of human energy; therefore, both terminated with the revealed code, and not before its completion. To have ceased earlier, would have been to leave the demonstrations of the last communications defective; to have continued longer, would have been to destroy those which preceded, and to have changed the spring-tide swell of a miracle, into the level flow of an ordinary providence. By these principles, we mean to try the Pentateuch, and upon them we hope to demonstrate *the Divine Legation of Moses.* To refer to them, if they accord with his pretensions, will supply the place of further argument, and render lengthened detail needless: because, if they are just in themselves, and a proper test of revelation generally, they must be conclusive in this particular application of them to the subject before us.

1. *The facts of the Mosaic history* require to be examined. Those which occupy the foreground are such as befit revelation, from their momentous cha-

racter, and such as could be learned from no other quarter. So important are they, that all men aspired after them;—so high, that no man attained unto them. With what simple dignity are they detailed! What grandeur of mind!—what plainness of speech!—what true sublimity present themselves! "The things which are seen are described according to their appearance, without violating one principle of sound philosophy. The clown becomes instructed on points which the sage could not discover. And who is confounded, but the proud and the speculatist? These facts relate to the origin of all things;—facts in which the human race have the deepest interest, and yet upon which they had the scantiest information.

It is in vain to assert that Moses borrowed his account of the Creation from Egypt, from India, or from any ancient philosophical system. A reference to any, or all of these, will shew that for such an opinion there is not the slightest foundation. There is just so much resemblance between them as may be supposed to subsist between truth and tradition;—tradition, once derived from truth, but having lost the trace of its original by the influence of change and corruption: that which was imperfect at first, becoming every day more obscured and more mutilated, mixed up with the prevailing customs and habits of thinking of the different nations and ages through which it passed, and over which it prevailed; and truth, pure, unmingled, immediately derived from the Fountain of Life and of Light himself. The systems of philosophers presented, in different countries and times, an unnatural combination of the most abstruse metaphysical subtilties, with the most extravagant dreams of the fancy. Causes and effects, real and imaginary, were confounded. Some contended for an

eternity of succession, maintaining the integrity of the whole, while the parts of which it is composed were admitted to be perpetually changing;—others imputed the organization of a system of matchless order and symmetry, to accident.—"Vain wisdom all, and false philosophy!"—School clamoured against school; and every new hypothesis presented confusion worse confounded. Amidst a jargon of terms, and a contradiction of systems, the most inextricable perplexity prevailed. The Jewish Legislator advances—he passes through the crowd of contending philosophers—he stands upon the margin of the sea and of the dry land—he raises his hand towards the skies, and proclaims, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Strife and uproar are at an end. Conflicting schools are silenced. The grand discovery is made. The Great First Cause is announced. Nothing is heard but the omnific word, "Light be;"—"and Light was." Will any man call upon me to *prove* that this is inspiration?

> "There stands the messenger of truth! there stands
> The legate of the skies!—his theme divine—
> His office sacred—his credentials clear."

And before the shining of his unveiled face, the twinkling stars of human science and philosophy—the pride of India and of Egypt, of Greece and of Rome,—the boast of the ancient schools—hide their diminished heads.

Here is the test, that revealed subjects should be such as lie beyond the grasp of human research, applied to the claims of Moses; and, as compared with all the schemes of human wisdom, it justifies those claims. Of this order, also, is the fact of human apostacy, and its simple, but affecting circumstances; without the

record of which, christianity would be a system of redemption offered to those who were ignorant of the cause and nature of their ruin; and a perpetual reference would recur to events unknown, because unrevealed, connected inseparably, nevertheless, with our present condition, and our eternal destiny. If these circumstances required an inspired pen, they are corroborated by traditions scattered over the whole world, coincident in their leading features, however altered and disguised, with the short and simple and melancholy detail of Moses. To dwell upon this is impossible: and we pass on to facts recorded of another description, and which are capable of confirmation from existing records, but which require to be only glanced at. It will be clear to every individual acquainted with the nature of the evidence relating to the subject assigned to me, that the full and faithful detail of it would require not a sermon, but a volume. The Deluge—the Dispersion of Babel—are interwoven with the most ancient records, with the origin of nations, and with the elements of science; and of science, too, daily expanding—as well as with testimonies, drawn from India, daily accumulating. Every thing tends to strengthen the pure veracity of the Mosaic record. The accounts of Abraham, of Jacob, of Moses himself, with the general circumstances of the Jews in the earliest periods of their history, are all confirmed by traditions so old, that they come to us through writers of antiquity, comparatively modern, and historians whose names, and the fragments of whose works alone survive, are handed down by Josephus, and Eusebius, and others. In general, upon this interesting topic, I beg to quote the language of one of the most learned and able writers of his day: and to pronounce his eulogy, for accuracy of judgment, profound learning, and diligent research, it is not necessary to do more than to name Jacob Bryant. He says,—"In the Mosaic writings, we have the native truth from which the Gentiles were continually receding. They varied so much, and every representation was so extravagant, that at first sight there seems scarce any similitude of the object from whence they drew. All appears dark and confused, so that we almost despair of an explanation. But, upon a nearer inspection, there is a more favourable appearance. For, though the copy is faded, and has been abused, yet there are some traces so permanent, some of the principal outlines so distinct, that, when compared with the original, the true character cannot be mistaken. I do not here mean that the ancients copied from the Scriptures: I am speaking of primitive traditional histories, to which, in their mythology, they continually referred; those histories which were every where corrupted, excepting in the writings of Moses."* And let it be remembered, that these are the sentiments and convictions of a man whose opinions were not hastily formed, before whom the treasures of ancient literature lay open to an unbounded extent, and who thus declared him, after the closest investigation of the subject.

Even in the absence of collateral testimony, there are those internal marks of evidence in the writings of Moses, which command and produce conviction. Let any man read the history of Abraham, his privations and his journeyings;—the life of Jacob, replete with afflictions and changes;—the history of Joseph—and stand by the dying bed of his patriarchal parent,—and then say, whether he can believe these affecting details,

* Bryant's Anc. Mythol. Vol. III. pp. 436, 437.

these strokes of nature, these bursts of feeling, these instances of devotion, these sacrifices of disinterestedness, these striking and unparalleled circumstances, to be fiction? A well wrought up tale may beguile him of his tears; but every where labour for effect, or some lurking traits of invention, betray themselves. But the history of Joseph goes to the heart; it is the voice of nature, to which the soul responds; and every attempt to embellish it has failed; every touch of man has weakened its force, and destroyed its pathos. Like heaven's own bow, its colours admit of no imitation; like it, they are displayed upon a dark and dropping cloud of sorrow; and like it, they fade and disappear, if any thing intervene between them and the sun of inspiration, whose reflex they are. There is that difference between the most skilfully framed fable, and a simple fact, which cannot be described, but which the heart feels in a moment: nor need we attempt to point it out; for nature, true to her own instincts, has decided the question, before the slower process of reason has submitted it to examination.

2. It is necessary to notice *the prophecies and miracles* attending the ministry of Moses: and if these be established, they place beyond dispute his divine legation. These are the superhuman powers and operations which support, and which alone can support, supernatural claims. It is certain that God would not, could not countenance falsehood—it is equally clear that prophecy and miracle can only be communicated and effected by divine inspiration and energy. Pretensions to these may be advanced: and such pretensions are easily detected and exposed, when they profess to proceed upon a large, extended, and perpetuated scale. Such are the pretensions of Moses; and it behoves us to see how

they are borne out. Some have endeavoured to render revelation more rational, as they suppose, by softening down in translation, or explaining away in exposition, these stubborn miracles. Mr. Bellamy and Dr. Geddes have both done this, upon very different principles and from very different motives. The first has divested his version, so far as possible, of that which is miraculous, to meet, as he supposes, more readily, sceptical objections, and render more palatable (vain effort!) that which infidelity will always hate. But the uncompromising character of revelation in general, and of this part of it particularly, in doctrine, in facts, in miracles, in providences, is its grand evidence, and connects us with Him, who confounds us in the structure of a mite, no less than he overwhelms us in the burning splendour of a seraph. The great and the little are with us — all things are alike with him. The second has resolved the passage through the Red Sea into an unusual ebb, allowing it to be forded;—the giving of the law amidst "blackness, and darkness, and tempest, the sound of a trumpet, and the voice, of words," into an ordinary thunder-storm, working upon the fears and the superstition of the Jews;—the protecting and guiding pillar of cloud and fire, into a "bundle of straw, or some equally common combustible, carried on high poles, or a portable altar, smoking by day and blazing by night;"—and the plagues of Egypt, into inundations, storms, and darkness, rather exceeding the ordinary phenomena of nature in that particular country, of which the Jewish Leader availed himself, with great skill, to promote the object of their emancipation. Is this egregious trifling? or, is it disguised, and scarcely disguised infidelity? I am unwilling to pronounce an opinion: nor is it necessary, in pursuing the inquiry into the Divine Legation of

Moses. It is equally harmless, whether it be classed with frivolity or scepticism. Moses lays claim to miracles and to prophecy; and the question is,—Are these claims made out? The whole circumstances attending the ministry of the Jewish Leader are from first to last miraculous. For, admitting the mere historical facts, could they be otherwise? What but miracle could have effected the emancipation of the Jews? What but miracle could support their journey, supply their wants, sustain them during forty years' travel, and establish them amidst hostile nations? The miracles of the Mosaic history must be allowed, (the circumstances of the case requiring them,) or all the monuments of history must be destroyed. For the public records of the country, interwoven with those of other nations, the establishment of rites, ceremonies, observances, laws, at the moment arising out of these miraculous occurrences, and perpetuated from one generation to another, until the total extinction of the political existence of the Jews, and the irreparable ruin of their city and empire, leave no doubt, no reasonable doubt, as to the leading facts bearing this miraculous character. It was impossible, at any time, or under any circumstances, to impose these things upon the Jews, supposing them not to have happened. Could they be persuaded into the admission that they were fed from heaven by manna, and supplied with water from the rock, if indeed it were not so? Could Moses have said, "Know you this day: for I speak not with your children which have not known, and which have not seen the chastisement of the Lord your God, his greatness, his mighty hand, and his stretched-out arm, and his miracles, and his acts, which he did in the midst of Egypt unto Pharaoh the king of Egypt, and unto all his land; and what he did

unto the army of Egypt, unto their horses, and to their chariots; how he made the water of the Red Sea to overflow them as they pursued after you, and how the Lord hath destroyed them unto this day; and what he did unto you in the wilderness, until ye came into this place; and what he did unto Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben: how the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their households, and their tents, and all the substance that was in their possession, in the midst of all Israel: But your eyes have seen all the great acts of the Lord which he did."* Thus recapitulating the miraculous character of their journey up to the moment when he addressed them, could he have made this appeal if such events had not occurred? Could any subsequent attempt to impose upon their posterity succeed better? Would they not, at the very moment when such an attempt should be made, object the absence of all tradition, as well as all evidence relative to facts so extraordinary? Could the Jewish people be persuaded, as a whole, to consent to a fraud which was to be admitted into their public records, and to establish ceremonies, in many cases obnoxious to other countries from their singularity—in some opposed to their own evident propensities—in all imposing stern restrictions? It is not only not credible; but, upon every principle of sound reasoning, the supposition is absolutely inadmissible.

The *predictions* of the Mosaic history are of the clearest and most extraordinary character. That of Isaac, relative to the subordination of Esau to Jacob, and the subsequent emancipation of the elder brother from the yoke of the younger, when his empire should acquire future strength and stability; both parts of

* Deut. xi. 2—7.

the prediction relating to their unborn posterity, and the latter part, especially, accomplished many centuries afterwards in the reign of Joram, king of Judah. The prophecies of dying Jacob, which Sir W. Drummond and Volney would in vain resolve into astronomical symbols, calculations, and science—relating to the division of a country then unpossessed, and long afterwards distributed by lot, the lot falling in correspondence with the arrangements foreseen, and foretold by the expiring patriarch—and the still more important predictions blended with these, relating to the coming of the Messiah, and the salvation of the world, in which the best interests of mankind are involved, and with which the evidences of christianity are connected, to this day. The consideration of these only would constitute Moses but the recorder of the inspiration of others, instead of proving his divine legation. But what shall we say of his *own* predictions relative to the future destiny of the Israelites, in foresight of their apostacy?—the character of their enemies—the plagues which they should endure—the hopeless captivity into which they should be led—the continued calamities which would haunt them—the very alteration of the face of the country itself on their account—fruitfulness and beauty turning into barrenness and deformity?—All this was foretold — all this has been fulfilled: so that the present sterility of Judea, objected by infidelity against the glowing colours in which its former fertility was delineated by Moses, becomes in fact an evidence confirmatory of his inspiration, because it is an exact accomplishment of his predictions. And if his inspiration be conceded, his divine legation is established. And thus the third rule applies, and supernatural claims are supported by superhuman powers.

3. *The direct and superintending providence connected with the Mosaic economy,* and forming its peculiar feature. This is marked distinctly and powerfully in every possible stage of their history and political character.—In their establishment in Canaan. "We have heard with our ears, O God," said the Psalmist, "our fathers have told us what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old. How thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them; how thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out. For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them."* The hornet was sent before them to drive out the inhabitants of the land—the tempest and hail destroyed their enemies in battle; and thus they conquered nations superior to themselves in strength, and settled in power; the record of these things existing, not merely in their public archives, but in their national psalmody. In their preservation there, the same providential interpositions are manifested. The God who led them "through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water, and who brought them forth water out of the flinty rock,"† maintained them in the midst of hostile powers every where surrounding them. The prowess of the Jews was never very celebrated, although they sometimes exhibited signals of terrible desperation; they were too disposed to foreign idolatry, and were easily brought under a foreign yoke. In cases where they were left to their own resources

* Psalm xliv. 1—3. † Deut. viii. 15, &c.

they made no commanding figure among the kingdoms; and their existence as a nation, as a powerful nation especially, depended evidently upon immediate providential interposition.

Their theocracy constituted the grand and peculiar feature of their economy. Under whatever denomination of government they subsisted, God was their king; whether it were judicial or regal, the reference was ultimately to him, and all things were subordinated to him. He issued his commands—guiding their movements—restraining their lust of wealth or power—controlling their propensities—deciding what should be spared, and what should be destroyed—in effect, giving the tone and character to their political existence. The judges who neglected his mandates were punished; and Eli's house stands a terrible monument of his indignation. The monarchs who presumed to alter his commission were displaced; and Saul, who lost his crown by an act of disobedience, was not the only instance of deposition from the throne of Israel on a similar account. The division of the empire arose out of a departure from the laws ordained by the Supreme Sovereign. Objections are thus resolvable, not into arbitrary power, but into fathomless wisdom; not into abstract right and proprietorship, but into a moral government too profound for human apprehension; the reasons of which are not at present assigned, and the very obscurity of which corresponds with the constitution and course of nature, and with the daily and mysterious march of providence. Yet some important considerations are vouchsafed to us on this topic. The character of the Canaanites is frequently and powerfully held up to view. If they were devoted to destruction, it was because the crimes which stained their land rendered them worthy of death. The hand of the

magistrate would individually, in well-regulated states, have administered the punishment which was withheld only because of the prevalence of a general apostacy. The measure of their iniquity was full, therefore the land cast them out, abhorrent of nameless and unvisited impurities. The only thing that can be objected is, that the sword was employed, and the sword did not spare;—neither does the earthquake, the pestilence, famine, nor any instrument of providential punishment. That it was the cause of justice and of impartiality, was marked by threats to Israel of punishments for idolatry, and for other crimes characteristic of those nations, as severe as those which fell upon the Canaanites, even to local extermination. "If thou shalt hear in any one of thy cities, which the Lord thy God hath given thee to dwell there, saying, Certain men, the children of Belial, are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which ye have not known; Then shalt thou inquire, and make search, and ask diligently; and, behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought among you; thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all that is therein, and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword. And thou shalt gather all the spoil of it into the midst of the street thereof, and shalt burn with fire the city, and all the spoil thereof every whit, for the Lord thy God: and it shall be an heap for ever; it shall not be built again."* And when children suffer in the general ruin, it is most certain that the calamity is temporal, and temporal only; that it falls under that general sweep of divine

* Deut. xiii. 12—16.

visitation for national offences, which is the same in character and principle, whatever be the instrumentality; and which is witnessed in ordinary providential dispensations up to this hour.

This direct and superintending providence, connected with the Mosaic economy, is Dr. Warburton's great argument. He proves it beyond dispute, and he produces it as *the* evidence of the divine legation of Moses; so clearly established, he judges, by this extraordinary fact constantly acting upon the Jewish nation, that Moses did not feel it necessary to resort to the sanctions of a future state in the enforcement of his law. It had already a sufficient and irresistible sanction as a law upon the people, in the present rewards and punishments held out in the code, and invariably enforced and accomplished by immediate providences. Other legislators had felt themselves compelled to resort to the awful sanctions of futurity in order to give force to their enactments: but Moses, secure in his divine legation, appealed to a present and ceaseless superintendence: referred all things to this—to rewards immediately bestowed—to punishments inflicted as soon as they were incurred. It often happens that we are indebted to learned, laborious, and intelligent men for their researches, when we feel ourselves obliged to reject their conclusions. We grant to the full extent the unanswerable proofs of the theocracy which he produces—we allow that present rewards and punishments are principally insisted upon, and that *direct* sanctions from the future are not advanced; but we deny that these are to be considered as excluded from the Mosaic economy. That which was the common hope of patriarchs, whose lives he recorded, and whose expectations he stated, could not be imagined to be separated

from his system. From the Pentateuch—from that which would be perhaps considered as the most indirect and undesigned part of it, and *therefore* of the greatest weight, as shewing the spirit of the economy *because* so manifestly indirect and undesigned—does Jesus adduce his argument against the Sadducees, touching the resurrection. "Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to him: ye, therefore, do greatly err."* It was the common expectation of the patriarchs, and determined their sacrifices; therefore could not be lost sight of by him who gave their history. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city."† That such a direct interposition of the divine providence, as constituted the theocracy, obtained under the Mosaic economy, and in the establishment of the Jews as a nation, may well be conceded; when, even at this moment, a preternatural superintendence of the same people is exercised in their scattered and desolate condition. The Power which keeps nine

* Matt. xxii. 31, 32. Mark xii. 24, 26, 27. especially Luke xx. 37, 38.

† Heb. xi. 13—16.

millions of them afloat among different nations, in different climates, amidst clashing interests, often avowed hostility and cruel persecution, more than seventeen hundred years after their dispersion, may readily be conceived to have presided over them in their own country---to have preserved them when surrounded by nations mightier than themselves—and to have governed them by immediate interposition in their fixed political state.

4. *The character of the Mosaic law evidently is divine,*—and this in all the branches into which it is distributed. If we consider that part of it which is *political*—it is, indeed, peculiar to the Jews, yet is it general in its principles; and *so* general, as to become applicable, with certain modifications, called for by different circumstances and ages, to all countries. This is the more remarkable, on account of the very extraordinary situation of the Jews, as placed under a direct theocracy. That some things should necessarily affect them alone, and be expressly framed to meet the peculiarity of their political character, can excite no surprise; but that the general principles of even their prescribed policy, should be so perfect in themselves, and separated from local interests, as to form the basis of the best laws which have governed the best regulated states in all ages, speaks demonstration as to their divine origin.

But what shall we say of the *moral law?*—matchless in its constitution—spiritual in its nature—eternal in its obligations. What legislator ever conceived such a code of morals? Comprehensively concise, in few precepts it combines infinite interests, and embraces the whole circle of duty to God and to man. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first and great commandment,—and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."* It is evident that such principles must be unalterable; for truth and morals are eternal, and must be so unless God himself could change. But it required the infinite wisdom of Him, "who came not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil," to shew, as he has done in the Sermon on the Mount, the pure spirituality of this law, extending to every motive and thought, no less than to every action; thus taking away all expectation of justification by it, and exhibiting himself as "the end of the law for righteousness."

The *ceremonial* law was partly commemorative, but principally typical; and sometimes these objects were blended. They were so in the Passover, which, although evidently commemorative, was as certainly typical. It is expressly said, "And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever. And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the Lord will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service. And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses."† It is, then, unquestionably commemorative; but when the circumstances of its observance are regarded—the selection and treatment of the victim, the manner in which it was to be eaten—the

* Matt. xxii. 37—40. with Mark xii. 30.

† Exod. xii. 24—27.

sprinkling of blood,—must it not also be considered as typical? And shall we not say with St. Paul, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth?"* The bearings of the ceremonial law upon the gospel dispensation, are so numerous, so evident, and so constant, that it is impossible to give even a plausible interpretation of them, if they be separated from this their declared and legitimate connexion. Its peculiarities all take this direction; its sacrifices all terminate in Him, who, in the fulness of time, was manifested to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself. "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect."† But they still were typical of the grand and eternal sacrifice offered on Calvary.

5. *Sanctions of the New Testament*, given to the law, establish the important subject for which we are contending. The Son of God himself testifies to the Divine Legation of Moses, and appeals to his writings. Let us particularly observe this evidence, which cannot fail to be conclusive in the estimation of all those who admit the truth of christianity, and the authority of its Founder.—"Search the Scriptures," he says; "for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." But what Scriptures? The writings of Moses, the historical records of the country, the prophets, the devotional parts of the inspired writings—in a word, what is emphatically called

* 1 Cor. v. 7, 8. † Heb. x. 1.

the Old Testament, were the only existing Scriptures. All these he claims as referring to, and accomplished in himself. "And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me."* "And beginning at Moses, and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."† The titles given to the Scriptures by Jesus, embrace the entire volume of the Old Testament as arranged by the Jews. And while Moses stands at the head of this general exposition, in connexion with the injunction first referred to,‡ Moses is the grand object of appeal. "Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?"§ The Apostles all bear the same testimony; and the Epistle to the Hebrews is expressly written on this principle;—not only the typical reference of sacrifices to the Saviour of the world is shewn, but more minute circumstances are pointed out in the ceremonies and even the construction of the sanctuary. "Now of the things which we have spoken, this is the sum: We have such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore, it is of necessity that this man

* Luke xxiv. 44. † Ibid. ver. 27.
‡ John v. 39. § Ibid. ver. 45—47.

have somewhat also to offer. For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, see (saith he) that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the Mount. But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises."* In all these instances, the inspiration of Moses is admitted; his testimony is appealed to; the facts of his history are allowed; his legislation and his writings are clothed with the authority of revelation; and if his Divine Legation be denied, it must be by sacrificing christianity which identifies itself with his claims.

6. *The leading features of the Mosaic economy are to be inferred from what has preceded;* and they are briefly these:

It was *peculiar*—answering to the call, selection, and preservation of the Jews; especially in the existence of a theocracy, to which it was adapted, and thus presenting an aspect characteristic of that dispensation, and unlike the ordinary march of human affairs, although subject to the sovereign disposal of the same eternal providence.

It was *preparatory*—designed to prepare the way for Him whose right it is to reign, and who must reign for ever and ever. "And Moses verily was faithful in all the house of God as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after: but Christ, as a Son, over his

* Heb. viii. 1—6.

own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.*"

It was *typical*.—The brazen serpent, among other interesting symbols, may, on this occasion, represent the whole. The poor, expiring wretch, even at the extremity of the camp, turned his eyes upon this conspicuous object in its centre—he looked, and lived. Long afterwards the prophets cried, in the name of the Son of God, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." And last of all came Jesus, to explain its import, and dispense more than its healing influences. And he said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."†

It was *prophetical*—not to the eye only in types, but to the ear also in predictions, more or less obscure, as the times advanced and the Messiah was declared: and "the seed of the woman,"—"the Shiloh" of Jacob—"the Star and Sceptre" of Balaam,—"the seed of Abraham," in whom all nations and families of the earth were to be blessed, was announced under another official designation by Moses himself: "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet, from the midst of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken."‡

It was a *contrast*—in the splendour of its rites to the simplicity of the gospel—in the general temporal character of its sanctions to the more powerful and more clearly manifested appeals of christianity to the future; in the palpable forms of its subsistence, to

* Heb. iii. 5, 6. † John iii. 14, 15.
‡ Deut. xviii. 15, 18, 19. comp. with Acts iii. 22, 23.

the spirituality of this last more glorious ministration; in its character of terror, to the mild dispensation of peace and love in which it terminated. It was the "great and strong wind rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks;"—"the earthquake," and "the fire," preceding the "still small voice" of incarnate Deity. "For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (for they could not endure that which was commanded, and if so much as a beast touched the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: and so terrible was the sight that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:) But ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven; and to God the Judge of all; and to the spirits of just men made perfect; and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."*

Upon the whole it is clear, that the Divine Legation of Moses has every evidence which can bear upon revelation in general: tried by every acknowledged rule, it abides the test, and establishes its pretensions. Its facts are demonstrably true; its subjects lie beyond the grasp of human research; and its supernatural claims are supported by superhuman powers and operations. Its miracles and prophecies constitute an essential part of the history and the legislation—run

* Heb. xii. 18—24.

through the national character—the religious rites—the distinguishing government—the political existence—and even the present preservation of the Jews. And it is moreover so interwoven with the sanctions of Jesus Christ, that it is impossible to destroy the one without denying the other. All the evidences that demonstrate christianity, add the intire weight of their support to the claims of Moses. The confluent tides of time and providence—sometimes flowing a deep, silent, fathomless river—sometimes pouring their congregated torrents in the thunder of mighty cataracts—whether sleeping in the meadow, or bursting over the rock—set in, with undeviating current, and undiminished fulness, upon the infinite ocean of redemption. All things centre in Christ: and it is Christ himself who recognises the Divine Legation of Moses, and the leading features of the Mosaic economy, when he says, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

LECTURE III.

THE EVIDENCE ARISING FROM PROPHECY.

By H. F. BURDER, M.A.

LECTURE III.

THE EVIDENCE ARISING FROM PROPHECY.

ISAIAH xlvi. 9, 10.

I am God, and there is none like me: declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done.

IT is the glory of man's intellectual nature, that neither his materials of thought, nor his sources of enjoyment, are circumscribed by the limits of actual perception. By the wondrous endowment of memory, that which has long since passed away from our inspection, instead of being obliterated from the mind, without leaving a single trace of its former presence, may have a perpetuated or a renewed existence, and, by the influence of some powerful excitement, may start forth within the sphere of mental vision with almost the vividness of the original impression. The consciousness of this mysterious power, and the indications of its presence in other minds, prepare us to receive the attested records of the days and years and ages which are past.

With the recollections of the past, man is also empowered, by the Author of his being, to blend some anticipations of the future. Encouraged, both by reason and by revelation, to expect a continuance

of the course of nature, and of regularity in the order of causes and effects, his reminiscences of the past aid his calculations of the future. Experience becomes the guide of his arrangements; and sagacity, if not interdicted by prudence, in some instances aspires to the character of foresight.

The province, however, within which that sagacity can promulge its anticipations with any degree of well-founded confidence, is bounded by very narrow limits of time and space and circumstance; and even within those limits, its credit is hazarded, the moment in which, not satisfied with conjecture, it ventures on the announcement of a direct prediction.

Prophecy can belong only to prescience, and prescience can be attributed only to that mind which is at once omniscient and omnipotent. He only who formed all creatures can have a perfect knowledge of all their capabilities. He only who first established and still sustains the course of nature, can have a perfect knowledge of all its tendencies and all its results. He alone who controls all events, is secure from the possibility of having his designs frustrated or his purposes counteracted. But to him who is the fountain of all being and all power and all intelligence, the future is as distinctly known as the past; so that the book of his decrees is as distinctly written as the book of his remembrance. If, then, he thus foresees the future, he can, if it so please him, disclose any part of the train of future events, otherwise concealed from human sight by an impenetrable veil.

The question before us is, whether he has done this, and whether he has empowered his servants, in various ages, so to record their predictions in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, that a comparison of those prophecies with the subsequent course of events

presents a strong, convincing, and irrefragable argument, in proof of the inspiration and authority of the book in which they are contained.

This is the subject which has been assigned to me for discussion, and to this I now invite your fixed and unprejudiced attention.

There are three things which I presume will be expected from me on this occasion:—

A specification of the principles requisite to render prophecy an evidence of a divine revelation:—
An exemplification of these principles in some instances of predictions recorded in the Scriptures:—
And a concise summary of inferences and reflections arising out of the general argument.

First, then, I am to attempt a specification of the principles requisite to render prophecy a proof of inspiration.

In some introductory remarks, I have assumed the existence and the prescience of God; but the assumption is by no means necessary to the argument on which I now enter.

On even the most cursory perusal of the books of the Old and New Testaments, it must be obvious, that many declarations of the writers are in the form and language of prophecy. Let those instances, then, only be adduced in evidence of divine inspiration, which will bear the application of the three following tests:

1. There must be full and satisfactory evidence that the prophecy was both recorded and promulgated before the event which it describes. If there be any just ground of suspicion that the document was written or modified subsequently to the occurrence, or even if there be the absence of proof that it was previously written, it can have no place in the present argument.

2. The accordance between the prediction and the event must be obvious and palpable, not requiring ingenuity of explanation to render it apparent, or authorizing the continuance of doubt and uncertainty, when the comparison has been made between the one and the other.

3. The event itself must be of such a nature, that when the prophecy was promulged, it must have been impossible for human sagacity to have foreseen its occurrence, even with the aid of the most accurate knowledge of existing circumstances and apparent tendencies.

To these criteria, which a sound understanding may readily prescribe, and must instantly approve, an appeal has been made in a recent publication on Prophecy; and, by the application of these tests, we are willing that the question before us should be decided. If we can find a single prophecy, clearly distinguished by these characteristics, it must be admitted, that we establish a proof of divine prescience, and of divine inspiration. If we can successfully apply these tests to many distinct and independent instances, in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, we present in every separate case, a valid and decisive argument in proof of their authority and inspiration: so that the accumulated weight and force of evidence are to be estimated, by the combination of the various instances. Within the limits, however, of a single sermon, but little justice can be rendered to an argument which demands a volume. It must be with a determined effort of condensation that I now proceed,

Secondly, To select some examples of Scripture prophecy, with a view to the application of the specified tests.

Many of the most striking and important of the predictions contained in the Bible, may be included in three classes.

To the first may be referred the prophecies of the Old Testament, of which the accomplishment is recorded in the New.

To the second class may be referred the prophecies both of the Old and of the New Testaments, of the accomplishment of which we have well-attested records, independently of the Scriptures themselves, or of which the fulfilment is taking place in the present day.

To the third class may be referred the prophecies both of the Old Testament and of the New which still remain unfulfilled.

This classification is not submitted to your regard as inclusive of all the prophecies of Scripture, but simply as descriptive of those which appear to have the strongest claim to consideration in our present argument.

Under the first of these classes, I will satisfy myself with adverting to the predictions in the Old Testament relative to the Messiah. Did your time permit, I would now read to you a series of predictions, selected chiefly from the writings of David and of Isaiah, which foretell, in terms as definite as is compatible with the design of prophecy, the following circumstances:—That the Messiah was to be a descendant of David—that he was to be the Son of a Virgin—that he was to be a native of Bethlehem—that he was to be a resident in Galilee—that he was to be destitute of external recommendations to public notice—that he was to pass through a life of suffering—that he was to be betrayed by a familiar friend—that he was to be proceeded against as a culprit—that he was to display consummate meekness and patience—that he was to be cut off by a violent death, yet with the forms of justice—that his apparel should be parcelled out among his executioners—that, although

classed among malefactors, he should be interred in a rich man's tomb—that he should rise again from the dead, without undergoing the process of corruption—and that he should leave this world, and ascend up into heaven.

A very considerable number of these circumstances are to be found, as you are aware, within the compass of one single chapter—the 53d of Isaiah. And I now ask you to apply to these predictions the three tests which have been laid down.

Is it certain that these prophecies were written and given to the world previously to the events? Our appeal is to the Jews, who still are, and ever have been, the adversaries of christianity. "The Jews (it has been well said) are our librarians." These prophecies are in their Bibles as well as in ours: and it is a well-authenticated fact, not only that they were extant in the original Hebrew, but also in a Greek translation, long before the æra of the gospel history.

Apply the second criterion. Is there an obvious and palpable accordance between these predictions of the ancient prophets and the record of the occurrences? I need only ask you to compare the 53d chapter of Isaiah with the history of the events given by the Evangelists, and then to say what effect is produced by observing the precise, the minute, and the multiplied coincidences between the one and the other.

Apply now the third criterion, and tell me whether circumstances so complicated, so unparalleled, so far removed from the range of human conjecture, could, by any possibility, have been foreseen even by the most sagacious of our race. If, then, this be inconceivable and impossible, the predictions must be traced to divine prescience, and the books which contain them must have the authority of divine inspiration.

To a second class of prophecies I proposed to refer those predictions, both of the Old and the New Testaments, of the accomplishment of which we have attestations, independently of the Scriptures, either from historic documents of unquestionable authority, or from the course of events in the present day.

I might here enter on the consideration of Daniel's astonishing prophecy respecting the four successive monarchies, which, for a course of ages, were to give law to the most cultivated and the most interesting nations of the earth. I might also advert at length to the explicit predictions respecting Egypt and Tyre and Nineveh and Babylon; but what can I attempt on such topics as these, within the limits of a single discourse? I must content myself with a concise reference to a few striking prophecies, of the fulfilment of which every one of my hearers (even were he destitute of an acquaintance with ancient history) may be supposed a competent judge.

Let me, then, first call your attention to the prophecies which regard the exile of the Jewish people, as the just punishment of their sins. Read a few verses of the 28th chapter of Deuteronomy, beginning with the 58th: "If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD; then the Lord will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues and of long continuance.—And it shall come to pass, that as the Lord rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the Lord will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the

earth even unto the other:—And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the Lord shall give thee a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life.—And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb and a by-word among all nations, whither the Lord shall lead thee." Now let it be remarked, that there is here no reference to any one period exclusively, but to all periods in their subsequent history, in which, as a nation, they should daringly and obdurately disregard the word of the Lord their God. It may be presumed, then, that the fulfilment of the predictions would be most obvious when the guilt of the people should be most aggravated. If, then, we find in their *early* history a *partial* accomplishment, what should we expect to be the result, after they had *filled up the measure of their iniquities*, by putting to death the Lord of glory, who, in the foresight of his own rejection and crucifixion, predicted, that they "should be led away captive into all nations, and that Jerusalem should be trodden down of the Gentiles?"

Apply now the three criteria to these predictions.

With regard to the first, it may be sufficient to observe, that the antiquity and authenticity of the Pentateuch containing these predictions, are not only admitted by the Jews themselves, but are established, among other proofs, by the agreement between the copies in the possession of the Jews and the state of the text in the custody of the ancient Samaritans, notwithstanding the determined enmity between the two rival kingdoms.

In reference to the second criterion, the appeal may be made to every one of my hearers, without apprehension as to the result. Let the prophecy be compared with the history of the Iraelitish nation. Call to mind the captivity of the ten tribes, and the dispersion of 2500 years. Call to mind the captivity of the tribe of Judah in Babylon, and the more calamitous exile commencing on the destruction of Jerusalem, and exhibiting no termination even at the present day. Has there ever been, in the history of the world, an instance of such an expatriation and dispersion, without the loss of national character and national physiognomy? Has there been an instance of a people subject to equal oppression and exaction and derision, yet surviving, and negotiating in gainful traffic with all the nations of the earth? To use the words of an able writer, "they are present in all countries, and with a home in none; intermixed, and yet separated, and neither amalgamated nor lost; but, like those mountain streams, which are said to pass through lakes of another kind of water, and keep a native quality to repel commixture, they hold communication without union, and may be traced as rivers without banks in the midst of the alien element which surrounds them." Sufficiently palpable, then, is the accordance between the predictions and the event.

To the third criterion I may, with equal confidence, appeal; for no one, I presume, will be disposed to contend, that the outlines of such a history could have been distinctly and boldly sketched 3000 years ago, by the exercise of mere sagacity.

Scarcely need I observe, how great an accession of strength the present argument derives, from a careful comparison of our Saviour's prophecy of the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, with the horrifying details of the siege and capture of the city, and the unparalleled calamities of the inhabitants, recorded

by the pen of Josephus, the Jewish historian. Without dwelling, however, on this branch of the convincing evidence, with which my respected hearers may be supposed familiar, I would now request your attention to a

Second series of predictions, both in the Old Testament and in the New. They regard the progressive diffusion of christianity through the Gentile nations.

It was foretold by David, as it had been ages before by Abraham, that men should be blessed in his illustrious descendant, and that "all nations should call him blessed." It was foretold by Isaiah, that "the earth should be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea;" "that the Messiah should be for a covenant of the people, for a light to the Gentiles;" "that he should bring forth judgment to the Gentiles;" "that he should not fail, nor be discouraged, till he had set judgment in the earth, and that the isles should wait for his law." It was foretold by Joel, that "God would pour out his Spirit upon all flesh." It was the command of Christ to his disciples, to go into all the world, in order to make disciples of all nations; and the command he connected with the assurance, that he would be with them even to the end of the world. That promise was equivalent to a prediction, that all the nations of the earth should eventually embrace the gospel.

With regard to the application of the first criterion to these prophecies, no repetition can be requisite of the remarks already made.

With regard to the second criterion, it is conceded that the fulfilment of the predictions is at present incomplete; but it is most obviously in glorious

progress. To many of the Gentile nations was christianity extended in the age of the apostles themselves.* To not a few countries has the gospel been extended in the day in which we have the happiness to live; and, from the rapidly accelerating progress, we have every encouragement to hope, that not distant is the period when the kingdoms of this world, without one exception, shall have actually become the kingdoms of Christ.

Apply then the third criterion, and say, whether any power of knowledge less than divine prescience could possibly have foretold or anticipated, even such a propagation of christianity as that which has already taken place? Think of the state of things among the Jewish people in the days of Isaiah, or even in the days of our Saviour. Think of the secluding barrier interposed between them and all other nations by the Mosaic institutions; think of the supercilious contempt with which, as a people, they regarded the Gentile tribes; think of the entire absence of all the literature and philosophy, requisite to recommend their religion to the adoption of other nations, even had they been disposed to attempt its propagation. Think of the light in which christianity was regarded in the days of Christ and his apostles, both by the Jewish people and by their Roman oppressors. Think of the qualifications of the men who were to attempt its promulgation, and say whether human sagacity could have foreseen its triumphs, and whether predictions so clear, so strong, so numerous, so coincident with the

* At the close of the second century, Tertullian thus writes, in his Apology:—"Are there not multitudes of us in every part of the world? It is true, we are but of yesterday, and yet we have filled all your towns, islands, castles, camps, courts, palaces, senate, forum. We leave you only your temples."

facts now recorded in the history of the christian church, must not necessarily have had an origin in the prescience which is divine?

Let me now add an outline of a third series of predictions: they regard the rise and progress of Antichrist.

From various parts of the New Testament, but especially from the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, and from the Book of the Revelation, we gather the following prophetic announcements. That within the pale of the christian church there should spring up a power aspiring to an authority no less than divine, and, in support of its claims, appealing to pretended miracles, and inducing multitudes to surrender their reason to the grossest infatuation;—that it should conjoin with the worship of God, the worship of created beings, angels, or saints;—that it should include among its prohibitions, abstinence from marriage, and abstinence from meats;—that, in the fury of its persecuting rage, it should be intoxicated with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus;—that it should number among its vassals many of the princes of the earth;—that the seat of its proud domination should be the celebrated city of the Seven Hills; and that its despotism should not be fully established, till the way should be prepared, by the prostration of that restraining power, which could be no other than imperial Rome, and which was so understood by many of the Christian Fathers.

With regard, then, to the first of our tests, it will be sufficient to observe, that we have the testimony of Tertullian, at the close of the 2d century, and of Jerome and Chrysostom in the fourth, not only in proof that these prophecies were then extant, but also that they were then understood by christians to predict the

rise and progress of Antichrist, on an approaching division and termination of the Roman empire.

With regard to the accordance between the predictions and the events, I need only say, judge for yourselves. Read the publications of Catholic authorities. Enter into their churches in Catholic countries. Mark their ritual. Listen to their prayers. Investigate the character of their spiritual domination over the intellect and over the conscience. Study their history, and then judge of the coincidence between the prophecies and the facts.

With regard to the third test, I will simply ask, whether, during the life of the despised and persecuted fishermen of Galilee, human sagacity could have foreseen, that after some centuries should have elapsed, the throne of the pontiffs should eclipse the throne of the Cæsars; that the splendour of the Vatican should surpass the glory of the Capitol, and that the fulminations of the Romish bishop should be more dreaded, both by princes and by people, than ever had been the decrees of the Roman senate, or the edicts of the Roman emperors, or even the thunderbolts of the Olympian deity?

These slight sketches of the prophecies of the second class, will, I trust, suffice for the purpose of our present argument; and I will only offer to your attention a few remarks in reference to those of the third class.

To this remaining class I refer the prophecies, both of the Old Testament and of the New, which are still unfulfilled. That they cannot, from the nature of the case, form a part of the direct argument, I readily concede; but neither can justice be done to the subject if they be overlooked. For, let it be considered, that they stand on the pages of scripture

prophecy, not in a detached and isolated form, but as constituent and connected parts of the grand system; commencing with the very period at which they were recorded, and reaching forwards to the consummation of all things. Then I argue, that it is reasonable to carry with us the impression, derived from the actual fulfilment of certain and ample portions of these prophecies, into the examination of the whole. And I contend, that if we do this, we cannot fail to discover, in some degree, a grandeur in the stupendous system, a boldness in the vast design, a congruity in the various parts, which give a challenge to the sceptics of each succeeding age, to enter on the strictest scrutiny, and which invite the believer to the most diligent investigation. There is also a singular and obvious parallelism between some of the yet unaccomplished prophecies of the Old Testament and of the New, illustrative of the unity of the prophetic scheme. Compare together some of the final predictions of Daniel with the corresponding predictions of John. Take a dispassionate view of the combination of unity in the system, with variety in the allegorical exhibition. Recollect that the former were written at Babylon about five centuries before the Christian Æra, and that the latter were written in Patmos, nearly at the close of the first century; and say, whether the comparison leaves upon your mind the impression of fallacy, originating in the contrivance of men, or of prophetic truth which can be traced only to prescience and to inspiration.

To this class of predictions belong the prophecy of the fall of the Western Antichrist, whose much abused symbol is the cross, and the prophecy of the destruction of the Eastern Antichrist, whose blood-stained symbol is the crescent, and the prophecy of

the entire abolition of pagan polytheism, with its innumerable idols, and the prophecy of the long-desired period of millennial glory. Yes; and, let me add to these the momentous prophecy of the day of retribution, ushered in by all the inconceivably awful solemnities of the Messiah's second advent, amid encircling angels, and opening graves, and melting elements, and a dissolving world. Of these future and spirit-stirring realities, we know nothing, except by the disclosures of Scripture Prophecy.

Behold, then, my friends, what is at stake in the consideration of the subject before us. On such a subject as that of Scripture Prophecy (even considered in itself, still more when regarded as one of the evidences of divine revelation), indifference must be infatuation. I call, then, upon every individual to examine and to decide. Respectfully and earnestly I call upon the unbeliever to examine the evidence which has been now adduced. The criteria to which I have appealed, cannot, with any appearance of reason, be impugned. I have endeavoured, with all fairness, to apply them to a few out of the many series of predictions which are recorded in our Bible—to those especially which regard the history of the Messiah, the exile of the Jews, the progress of the gospel, and the reign of Antichrist. What, then, is the effect which evidence of this character ought to produce? It has been justly observed, that, to an eye-witness, one single miracle (unquestionable in its character) would be a decisive proof of a divine agency, and convincing evidence of a divine commission. With equal justness may it be asserted, that one single prophecy, promulgated long before the event, agreeing in every particular with the event, and in its character removed far beyond the sphere of

human foresight, must become a clear, a direct, and an indubitable proof of divine prescience and inspiration. Has there not, then, been presented to you an argument of accumulative evidence and of corroborative force, arising from the specification of distinct and independent prophecies, submitted to the criteria prescribed? What, then, must be the aggregate of the accumulation, and the power of the argument, when the entire system of prophecy is brought to bear on the interesting and momentous subject, by a comparison of its multitudinous branches with the records of the ages which are past, and with the course of present events? If to only a very few of the many clustered pillars which sustain the edifice your attention has been now directed, what must be the firmness and solidity of the time-defying structure?

Let, then, the words of the text (and they are the words of Jehovah) sink deep into your minds. "Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." "To foresee and to foretell future events," observes a writer of deep research, "is a miracle, of which the testimony remains in itself: it is as much beyond the ability of human agents, as to cure diseases with a word, or even to raise the dead. The man who reads the prophecy, and perceives the corresponding event, is himself the witness of the miracle. He sees that thus it is, and that thus by human means it could not possibly have been. So admirably has this kind of evidence been contrived by the wisdom of God, that, in proportion as the lapse of ages might seem to weaken the argument derived from miracles long

since performed, that very lapse serves only to strengthen the argument derived from the completion of prophecy."

In what light, then, are we to regard the entire evidence in support of christianity, when we bear in mind, that to the evidence arising from prophecy is to be superadded the evidence arising from miracles; and that both conjoined form only a part of the complete and glorious demonstration! On this view of the subject, however, I need not dwell; since it was so ably exhibited in the discourse introductory to these Lectures.

It now only remains for me to attempt, IN CONCLUSION, a concise summary of inferences and reflections.

1. How unworthy of high pretensions to strength of intellect is the incredulity which yields not to evidence!

Is the soundness of the human understanding or the strength of its reasoning faculties to be estimated by its power of resisting evidence and excluding light? Or is it not equally characteristic of an ill-regulated mind, to believe on deficient evidence, and to continue unbelieving when the evidence is abundantly adequate and decisive? The man who would establish his claims to dignity of intellect, must disclose the workings of a mind, disciplined by the habit of weighing in the balance of enlightened reason, both evidence and argument, and honestly acknowledging the preponderance which it discerns. If, instead of a state of mind open to conviction, and favourable to the legitimate effect of argument, there be, on the contrary, a desire, an endeavour, and even a determination to resist the force of evidence, it is not surprising that scepticism should obtain the ascendancy, till reason is dethroned

and conscience becomes paralysed. The light which was in them has become darkness, and that darkness how profound! And "this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world; but they have loved darkness rather than light."

2. How striking is the contrast between the prophecies of the Bible, and the pretensions to prophecy among the heathen!

It is not surprising that political artifice and religious imposture should have practised upon the desire, so natural to man, of endeavouring to look into futurity; and no contrivances were ever more gainful to rulers or to priests, than those of augury, of divination, and of oracular responses; but mark their characteristics. They were either a direct engine of state, or subservient to the ruling authorities; whereas the prophecies of scripture were, in numerous instances, promulged in defiance of the reigning power, and at the hazard of life itself. The oracles of the heathen were vocal only in consideration of most costly presents; the prophets of Jehovah disdained to take a bribe. The predictions of the heathen related for the most part to some insulated, unconnected, and often unimportant events; the prophecies of scripture constitute so many associated parts of one grand and extended scheme. Above all, be it observed, that the oracles of the heathen were usually evasive and ambiguous, while those of the scripture are most explicit and circumstantial.

Of this ambiguity, let one single instance detain for a moment your attention. "When Crœsus consulted the Oracle at Delphi, in reference to his intended war against the Persians, he was told that he would destroy a great empire. This he naturally interpreted of his overcoming the Persians, though the Oracle was so framed as to admit of an opposite meaning. Crœsus made war against the Persians and was ruined, but the Oracle continued to maintain its credit." Well might that challenge be given to the idols and the oracles by the God of Israel. "Produce your cause, saith Jehovah, let them bring forth and shew us what shall happen. Shew us things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods. Behold, ye are of nothing. Thus saith the Lord, that frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backwards, and maketh their knowledge foolish; that confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messengers."

3. How important is sobriety of mind in the interpretation of prophecy, and especially in reference to the events of the day in which we live!

That the study of the prophecies is an important branch of christian duty, incumbent on all, and more especially on the ministers of religion, must appear, I think, from the considerations already adduced. The comparison of predictions with events is important, in order to the confirmation of the truth of the Bible. That we are not interdicted from the study of those parts of the volume of prophecy not yet fulfilled is, I think, evident from the blessing pronounced in the Apocalypse on him that readeth and keepeth the things written therein.

But the very consideration that an appeal is to be made to prophecy, in proof of the inspiration of the Scriptures, should impress upon our minds a deep and sacred awe, and should instil into our hearts a salutary dread, lest we lower the dignity and diminish the splendour of the prophetic records, by the fancies or the incongruities or the fallacies of our own interpretation, and thus create a prejudice in the minds of some against

the prophecies themselves, as a source of evidence, and in the minds of others against all attempts to elucidate their meaning.

As we are in danger of attaching an undue importance to that which regards ourselves as individuals, so are we in some danger of attaching an undue importance to that which regards the age in which we live. The events which are to be the materials for the history of our own times, seem invested with a peculiar interest and a portentous magnitude; yet their tendencies we are scarcely able to ascertain, how much less their results! To our descendants, perhaps, that may not appear to occupy a single line in the volume of prophecy, for which we were expecting to find a paragraph, if not a page.

In the fourth and last place—How gloriously conspicuous, throughout the entire system of scripture prophecy, are the character and work of the Lord Jesus Christ!

We need not wonder that of the Holy Spirit our Saviour said, "He shall glorify me;" for glory, in the very highest degree, he has rendered to the Lord Jesus Christ, by the very construction, by the general tenor, by the distinguishing contents, and by the pervading spirit of the prophetic volume. Of all the holy men, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, it may be said, "To Him bare all the prophets witness." Of the connected series of predictions, patriarchal, judaic, and christian, may it be asserted, that the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus; and never was there a development so interesting, so affecting, made to the mind of mortal man, as when (on the day of his resurrection) Jesus conversed with two of his disciples, and caused their hearts to burn within them, while, beginning at Moses and all the

prophets, he expounded to them, in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself. Not more distinguished in an epic poem is the hero, whose exploits it recounts, whose character it pourtrays,—not more conspicuous in a historic picture is the figure of the principal person,—than are, throughout the scheme of prophecy, the character and work of Him who is the brightness of his Father's glory. It is, in short, one dignified personage whom prophecy exhibits; it is one grand system which prophecy develops; it is one glorious consummation which prophecy foretells. And that which should heighten immeasurably our conceptions on this subject is, that this same unity of design, which gives a character to prophecy, pervades also the entire system of providence in the government of the world. The economy of providence, and the economy of prophecy, are coeval in their periods and coincident in their purposes. They both belong to the stupendous system of mediatorial glory, by which man's redemption is rendered compatible with the very attributes of deity, from which he had every thing to dread; and when that mediatorial economy shall have so ordered all events, as to have secured the accomplishment of the entire series of predictions, then shall the end come. "Behold, he cometh, and every eye shall see him."—"He who testifieth these things, saith, Surely I come quickly." Happy are you, my friends, if you are prepared to say, "Even so; come, Lord Jesus." But permit me to ask, Are you thus prepared? Have you embraced the testimony of the prophets and of the apostles, respecting the blessed and only Saviour? Is it the basis of all your hopes? Is it the source of your most lively and most valued delights? Imbibing the very spirit of the prophets and the apostles, can

you say, with the most illustrious of them all, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, — that I may win Christ, and be found in him." If this be your present blessedness, you shall shortly become the inhabitants of that glorious world, where the development of the scheme of prophecy shall be one of the many sources of ineffable delight in the immediate presence of Him, who can open the mystic book, the seals of which we are not able to loose. Already has been heard, in those regions of intelligence and joy, that inspiring song—"Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God, by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." Let us then unite with them in the universal chorus of praise, exclaiming, from our inmost souls, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." Amen.

LECTURE IV.

ON MIRACLES.

By JAMES STRATTEN.

LECTURE IV.

ON MIRACLES.

JOHN iii. 1, 2.

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

THE subject assigned to me in this important and interesting course of Lectures, is, "The evidence for Divine Revelation derived from Miracles." The text seems easily and naturally to introduce it to your attention.

This subject is at once extensive and profound; it embraces a large proportion of the Sacred Scriptures, and penetrates into the secrets of divine operation, and the deeps of divine power.

It will not be expected that I should discuss it, in all the length thereof, and all the breadth thereof. It will be sufficient for the purpose of our present discourse, if I confine myself to the alleged miracles of Jesus Christ.

A few specimens of his energy at a certain Jewish festival, not one of which is recorded, produced in the

mind of this Hebrew ruler, a deep conviction of his authority as a teacher come from God. And I doubt not, that a fair and candid examination of those miracles, of which a narrative is contained in the New Testament, will produce in our minds the invincible persuasion, that in the great matters of our religion, we have not followed cunningly devised fables, but divine and imperishable verities, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail. "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles which thou doest except God be with him."

I propose, in the first place, to give some account of the nature of a Miracle;—then to state the peculiar and distinctive features of the miracles of Jesus Christ;—in the next place, to illustrate the proof which they supply of a divine mission;—then to examine the objections which may be urged against it;—and, finally, to exhibit the conclusion which may be fairly deduced from the whole.

I shall endeavour to represent the argument concisely and luminously, without noticing various minute points which might be properly introduced on a topic that will admit of almost indefinite amplification.

It will not be necessary to analyze the different definitions of a miracle, which have been given by wise and learned men, so as to justify or refute their respective phraseologies. I shall merely state that which commends itself to my own mind, and which it will be my aim in this discourse to illustrate and support.

A Miracle is a deviation from the laws of nature, or the common course of things, effected by divine power.

This definition assumes, that there is an established and invariable order in all the agencies of nature; that they work in exquisite regularity, with uniform and perfect precision. Similar causes will always produce similar effects; or, to state the doctrine in the language of philosophy, the antecedents being the same, the sequences will invariably be the same. The application of fire to combustible materials will ignite them; the application of water in sufficient quantity will extinguish flame; water will in no case induce ignition in wood, or any similar substance;* fire will never diffuse moisture or create cold. In like manner there is, throughout all nature, a uniform system of operation; all the elements reciprocally act upon one another with invariable and undeviating certainty. The animate and inanimate creation, the intellectual and corporeal worlds, are alike subject to an efficient and inevitable causation, which philosophy denominates "the law of nature," but which is called in scripture "the ordinance of heaven." This law is universal, this ordinance is without exceptions; the orbs which roll throughout unmeasured space, and the atom which seems to wanton in the breeze, are alike subject to its exact and invincible control.

With the nature of the relation of cause and effect, (a matter of great importance in this inquiry,) we are unacquainted. This deep and subtle subject no philosophy has been able fully to explore; it remains a secret of the Almighty; and it is the glory of God to conceal a thing. Why, or how, or by what efficiency, the rose emits its fragrance, the musical instrument

* A chemical process, which I need not describe, renders necessary this qualification, of what might otherwise be deemed a universal principle.

sends forth its melody of sound, the loadstone attracts the iron, food and medicine act upon the fluids or the solids of the body, we know not; but that the same causes, throughout all nature, will produce the same effects, we know with absolute and infallible certainty. Upon this principle we proceed in all the ordinary actions and engagements of life, and we are never disappointed. The philosopher finds it to be equally fixed and certain in all his scientific experiments. The knowledge and belief of this certainty is supposed to be one of the original principles of our being, and we feel in it all the force, clearness, and confidence of intuition.

It is, moreover, of the utmost consequence to the welfare and happiness of man, that this order should subsist, and that it should be distinctly and fully known. Did it not subsist, the world would be a chaos, and the universe a vast confusion. Did we not know it, we could make no provision for our future wants; we could calculate with no certainty upon the operation and efficiency of the same causes hereafter; and in our ignorance, whether the same results would or would not follow, we might remain irresolute and trembling amid elements which were waiting to obey us, the victims of imaginary disorder amid all the harmonies of Divine workmanship.*

It is equally certain, that no human power can disturb this order, or interfere with this arrangement. In every case it has the force of irresistible and inevitable necessity. Fire will burn, upon the waves of the sea the human body will sink, a corpse in the grave will undergo decomposition; no mortal power, without the application of other physical causes counteracting these tendencies of nature, can overcome them. In like manner, water will not become wine; a few loaves and fishes will not magnify and multiply, as they are broken in pieces, and passed through twice four thousand hands, so as to furnish an ample meal for every one that touches them; nor the blind see, nor the lame leap, nor the dead be raised up at any human dictation. You or I might command these things in the presence of spectators, but it would be only to expose ourselves to mockery and derision. If the ordinary processes of nature are ever palpably and incontestibly inverted or disarranged, it must be by power and dictation, incomparably transcending that which mere man has ever possessed, or could ever exercise.

* See Dr. Brown, on the Relation of Cause and Effect.

On the ground of this invariableness of cause and effect, the *possibility* of such infraction of the laws of nature, as miracles suppose, has been questioned; and because *human* power cannot effect such changes and inversion, it has been doubted if there be *any* power that can. But surely this doubt is most unreasonable; that Being, who constituted the course of nature as it is, can unquestionably alter or modify it at his pleasure. The power which is required to perform any alleged miracle, is not so great as the power required to create, and which is continually exerted to sustain the unbroken harmony of nature as it now exists. The Supreme Power, the First and Last and Mightiest Energy, is not extinct. The *possibility* of miracles, therefore, must be admitted, or we are thrown back into all the darkness and horrors of a naked and appalling atheism.

The inquiry as to the *probability* of miraculous interposition, is one of more propriety and decorum. It is admitted, that to suspend his ordinary and universal laws, often, and on slight occasions, would be

incompatible with the wisdom and the majesty of God. If there be any averred miracles of this description, let them be examined with jealousy and rigour; and if they will not endure the severest scrutiny, let them be consigned to unbelief and reprobation. Brand them, if you please, as impostures; I consent that you cast upon them all the torrent of your scorn, and spend upon them all the fierceness of your indignation.

But if it can be shewn that the Supreme Power has, at any time, been forgotten or denied by men, that the elements have usurped in the human mind the place of the throne of God, that the creature has been worshipped and served instead of the Creator, then it becomes probable, that in some marked and decisive manner, he would interfere, to remind them of his own Being, and to vindicate his own Perfections. Now no man can deny that the miracles recorded in Scripture, were performed (if performed) under such circumstances, and for such an end. If it can be shewn, further, that some special and pre-eminent object of divine benignity is to be accomplished, by which the happiness of man and the glory of the moral government of God will be signally advanced; the miraculous interposition then becomes probable in a very high degree. This can easily be shewn: and no one who has attended to the testimony of the Gospel, can doubt or deny the advantage and blessedness of it as a revelation to man, admitting it to be true, or that it secures glory to God in the highest.

If, however, the probability of miraculous interposition be heightened to any degree, by the grandeur of the purpose which it is designed to achieve, yet are we justified in receiving the real and positive evidence for miracles with all caution and deliberation. Christianity requires this of us. It demands not assent and acceptance, without previous examination; it speaks as to wise and inquiring men; judge ye of its nature and claims and attestations.

We may proceed to the investigation of the evidence for miracles, as we should if the question were concerning the proof of any extraordinary phænomenon in philosophy. It must be met, not with a positive denial, nor with a refusal to examine, but with a cautious slowness of assent. And however strong our feeling of doubt may be, if, after full examination, we find the evidence to be such, that we could no longer hesitate in admitting it, if it had related to any other species of extraordinary event, the result of any combination of physical circumstances, however rare and uncommon, then are we not justified in rejecting it, simply because it is alleged to be a direct manifestation of the Supreme Power. If the evidence be clear and satisfactory, after all the caution and vigilance and penetration which we can command, then our doubts must vanish and conviction take place. I can confidently recommend this course of calm inquiry and deliberate investigation; it will lead to a vivid and powerful perception of the sufficiency of the evidence; it will terminate in the clear and cloudless sunshine of triumphant faith. I can say, in the touching and impassioned language of the Apostle Paul, to those who candidly hesitate, Be ye as I am, for I once was as ye now are.

Let us review the steps we have taken, and ascertain the progress we have made. There is an established and invariable order in all the agencies of nature. Of this, though we comprehend not perfectly the relation of cause and effect, we have undoubted proof and intuitive conviction. This order no human

power can in any case disturb. But its inversion, in any and every form, is possible to God. There is no probability against such change and suspension of his own laws, if an adequate purpose is to be accomplished; but, on the contrary, a high probability in its favour. Yet evidence of any such alleged interposition should be examined with the greatest care and caution.

II. We are now prepared to state, in the second place, the peculiar and distinctive features of the miracles of Jesus Christ.

The expression of the text is singular and emphatical, "No man can do *these miracles* which thou doest, except God be with him." It implies that to the mind of Nicodemus, they were unquestionable and conclusive proofs of his divine mission. And it should be remembered, that he was a man of rank and education. The narrative shews that he was slow of belief; in his colloquy with Christ, he appears not to be an enthusiast, captivated by novelties, and of an ardent imagination; but a man of inquisitive and, I had almost said, philosophical mind. He requires that the doctrines proposed to him should be fully explained; nothing will satisfy him but clear and rational and unfigurative statement. He was therefore competent to decide, and his judgment as to the truth and character of the miracles is unimpeachable.

It is freely admitted that there have been many and various attempts to impose upon mankind. Pretences have been made to miraculous power, where a close scrutiny would have discovered nothing but fraud and falsehood, imposture and delusion. But that which the eye of the spectator could not explore, his hand might often have detected. The two senses of touch and vision are seldom imposed upon at the same

time. Hence the expression of the Apostle John, "that which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life," to denote the impossibility of their being deceived. And, as many a pagan prodigy might be explained by the mere light of science, so many a papal wonder might have been exploded, and the effrontery of its authors exposed, if the fingers had been permitted to do their part in connexion with the eyes. The prophetic Scriptures had foretold their character, and branded them with appropriate signatures of infamy and execration—"Signs and *lying* wonders, all deceivableness of unrighteousness."

It may not be easy perhaps to assign the criteria by which the truth of a miracle is in every instance to be tried; they may vary in some degree with circumstances: but this large and extensive inquiry is not now before us. The question simply is, in what manner may the miracles of Christ be distinguished from the fables of paganism, the impostures of jesuits and monks, and the exploits of Prince Hohenloe and his coadjutors, so that the former may be as confidently considered true, as the latter must be pronounced false?

In answer to this question, I observe, in the first place, there was no worldly or selfish end to be accomplished by the miracles of Jesus Christ. It is not even pretended that he ever sought to aggrandize himself, or any party with which he stood connected. No remuneration of any kind was either asked or offered; there was a certain dignity in his person and actions which prevented the possibility of such a profane proposal: our minds revolt at the very thought. In every exertion of his power, we behold free and glorious mercy. There is an ineffable benevolence and grace in all his works of wonder, which

it seems impossible not to admire, and which, by a kind of miracle in inspiration, his biographers have simply narrated and not extolled.

He was born free from the wealth and grandeur of this world; he lived separate and apart both from the one and the other, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." He died in poverty and destitution. His relatives and his apostles derived no temporal advantage from their connexion with him. There was either no object to be accomplished by his miraculous energy, or one pure of the breath of this world's contamination.

Secondly, There was a purpose at once simple and sublime to be effected. His miracles were unquestionably intended to be attestations of the truth of the doctrine which he delivered. The knowledge of this doctrine, and the certainty of its truth, are of the utmost consequence to man. It asserts his immortality; it shews how endless life and blessedness can be conferred on principles honourable to the moral government of God; it sheds a pure and satisfying light over the darkness of the mind; it supplies, what was infinitely to be desired, a clear view of our relation to the Supreme Spirit, and of the prospects of another state. Now admitting the doctrine to be true, its authentication and proof by miracle was of inexpressible importance; nothing can be imagined more worthy of divine interposition. The miracles were wrought (if wrought) not to magnify a saint, not to exalt a sect, not to bring money to the coffers of priests, but to attest and establish life and incorruption, as brought to light by the gospel.

Thirdly, The doctrine thus attested did not coincide with the passions and prejudices of the men

to whom it was addressed. It was too spiritual and refined for a corrupt generation, whose hearts were set on worldly dominion and sensual indulgence. It was too general and diffusive in its character, for a people proud of their own exclusive privileges and peculiar immunities. It corresponded not with the hopes and expectations which the Jewish princes, priests, and rulers, had fondly cherished. And accordingly we find, that such was the bitterness of their disappointment, and the rancour of their malignity, that they rejected the doctrine, maligned the miracles, and put the author of them to death.

Such, then, is the character of Him who is affirmed to have wrought the miracles; he could be actuated by no worldly or selfish motive. There was an end to be effected most magnificent and glorious, most elevated, pure, and spiritual, admitting the gospel to be true. And yet it directly opposed the passions and prejudices of the people to whom it was immediately addressed. It secured him no *eclat;* it brought him no popularity; it prepared the way to no honours, civil or ecclesiastical (and these are the things which Mr. Hume considers wonderfully attractive to an excited and enthusiastic mind;) it brought him to the agony and ignominy of crucifixion.

Thus the character and purpose of Jesus Christ stand fair and open, cloudless and unshadowed. There is no stain upon his glory; there is no blemish upon his pretensions; there is nothing to vitiate the *man,* or cast a doubt upon his credentials.

Inasmuch, then, as the worker of the miracles is exempt from all possibility of accusation, let us proceed to examine the miracles themselves; and,

First, They were original. The primitive idea of them was in his own mind, as the first discovery and

exhibition of them was by his own power. Changing water into wine—walking upon the billows of the sea—commanding the tempest—feeding a multitude with a very small quantity of provision—giving instantaneous speech to the dumb, and sight to the blind—are acts fair and beautiful to the imagination, and the very conception of them originated entirely with the sacred writers.

All the pretended miracles of paganism and popery are but coarse and awkward imitations of the miracles of revelation. There is nothing narrated in pagan authors worthy the name of miracle, the primary principle of which cannot be obviously traced back to the inspired writings; and every imposture attempted since the Christian æra, has borne evident resemblance to the original which suggested the idea. Now the counterfeit coin comes after the true, supposes and implies its existence and currency; and thus there is a kind of homage extorted from false miracles to the value and glory of the true.

Secondly, They were instantaneous, and performed without any instrumentality whatever. In the case of the water and wine at Cana of Galilee, had Christ announced his intention, had he required time, had any magical instruments been introduced, we might have suspected an imposition on the senses, or the skilful application of secondary causes. But it was done in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and without a word.

> "The timid water saw its God, and blush'd."

When he commanded the tempest, in an instant the wind ceased, the billows sunk to rest and stillness, and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.

Had the people been invited to a particular place to see the miracles, as in a case of legerdemain and sleight of hand, it would have been open to suspicion. But he went about, and in all places, with the suddenness and ease of divine power, he accomplished the blessed purposes of his mercy and good-will. Those who attended him were accustomed to say, "Let him speak only, and it shall be done;" "Let me but touch the hem of his garment, and I shall be recovered;" and as many as touched it were made perfectly whole of whatever disease they had.

According to his own pleasure, and either with or without a word, he healed all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed of devils, and those which were lunatic, and those which had the palsy. He changed the elements of nature; he controlled the motions of the fishes of the sea, and either dispersed them, or brought them to the net; he revealed the deepest secrets of human hearts; he raised the dead; and when he spake and wrought the miracle, or wrought the miracle without speaking, nothing was to be seen, nothing was to be felt but a man: the mightiest of his operations were instantaneous and perfect, yet he carried not even a rod, like Moses, as the emblem of his power or the instrument of his energy.

There are, indeed, three cases which may be deemed exceptions to this rule, those of the deaf man near the sea of Galilee, the blind man at Jerusalem, and another near Bethsaida. But clay and spittle, the means made use of in these instances, were more adapted in their own nature, to extinguish than to restore sight; and it seems reasonable to suppose that Christ intended it as an appeal and proof to the perfect senses of these men, that he was the person who

restored those which were imperfect, or created those which never had been enjoyed. The exceptions, therefore, illustrate and establish the rule, unless we choose to carry the principle still farther, and assert, that in these three instances he employed means which, in their own nature, were in direct opposition to his kind and beneficent design.

Thirdly, They were performed in the presence of numerous and competent witnesses. At Cana, there was the bridegroom and all his guests. The leper, who was healed at the close of the sermon on the mount, received his cure in the presence of the multitude who had listened to that discourse. The restoration of the widow's son at Nain, was in the face of all the mourners and the accompanying crowd, together with the people who attended Jesus to hear his sermons and see his works. The man with the withered arm was healed in the Synagogue before the congregation, and in the presence of some of the bitterest enemies of Christ. He had proved the justice and piety and mercy of the cure being performed on the Sabbath day,—"Then said he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand; and he stretched it forth, and it was restored whole like the other." The paralytic was healed in the midst of a vast concourse of people and in the face of Pharisees and Scribes. Four thousand men on one occasion, and five thousand on another, ate of the bread and fish which magnified and multiplied as it passed from hand to hand, and from rank to rank. At the resurrection of Lazarus, were present the friends and relatives of the deceased, and many incidental passengers, who, with a malicious motive, reported it to the Jewish rulers: so that by friends and by enemies, by the learned and the vulgar, by the objects of his compassionate power, and by their relatives and acquaintance, in Jerusalem and in all Judea, in towns and cities and villages, by the space of several years, was the miraculous energy of Jesus Christ seen, experienced, and attested. It was not, therefore, an empty boast, but an incontestible fact that could not be contravened, which Peter asserted, when addressing the multitude and the Sanhedrim, he said, "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, *as ye yourselves also know.*"

Fourthly, They were manifestly above all natural or scientific power. After all the boasted discoveries of modern times, it is not even pretended that any one of the works of Christ can be performed by chemistry, or galvanism, or electricity, or any other art. They are miracles to this day, in the midst of all that philosophy can perform, and they will remain palpably so to the end of the world. To impart to a dumb man the power of articulation, and the knowledge of language at the same time, to enable him to speak at once plainly and intelligently, is a work of God; it bears the signature of that hand which framed our nature in the beginning, it contains a proof of that omniscience which sees all the secrets of our being at a glance, and a demonstration of that energy to which nothing is impossible. The same remarks will apply to the recovery of maimed limbs, the instantaneous creation of new organs in imperfect bodies, the suspension of the laws of all the elements, and the resurrection of the dead. Before this power, science must confess the impotency and the insignificance of her achievements: here is a mightier and a purer splendour which eclipses and extinguishes the lustre of her beams.

Fifthly, Notwithstanding this high place which is claimed for them, they were addressed to the senses; they were plain and palpable, and easy to be understood. Here is no pretence of dreams and visions of the night—of splendid phænomena in the heavens—of the abstractions and mysteries of intellectual and metaphysical philosophy. These were matters which the multitude could not understand, and to which, therefore, their testimony would be incompetent and unsatisfactory. But hungry men upon a mountain, after three days' fast, could tell whether they had partaken of a full meal or not. Fishermen were sure and sufficient judges of all that related to fish, and winds, and waves. The miracles of Christ were not only obvious to their senses, but accommodated to their profession and habits of life. Nothing is more sensible to us than sickness and health, vigour and emaciation, the want of limbs and the use of limbs, the absence or imperfection of any of the organs of the corporeal senses, or the harmonious exercise and full enjoyment of them all. We are infallibly certain of the difference between the corpse of a relative, and the animated, happy, vivacious object of our affection. In all the cases comprehended in this statement, the miracles were addressed to the senses; misconception was impossible; the facts were indubitably certain.

Lastly, they were of great variety and profusion. None of the miracles which Nicodemus saw are recorded. The Apostle John assures us that a very small proportion of the works of Christ were written in his narrative. And yet, in the account which is preserved to us, we find the cure of all manner of sickness and disease, of every diversity of mental derangement and distress. There are miracles upon the sea and the creatures which are in it;—upon the winds

in their tempestuous fury;—upon the elements, which nourish and support human life:—miracles in the regions of the dead; upon a child, whose spirit had just escaped, and whose fair corpse seemed as if asleep; upon a youth, whose body was being conveyed to the sepulchre after the process of corruption had begun; and upon a person in maturity, whose body had already undergone the dishonour and defilement of the grave; and in all places with equal ease and dignity, by means and with the rapidity of a single volition, was the effect produced.

An attempt has been made to place in comparison with the miracles of Christ, the wonders said to have been wrought at the tomb of a Jansenist saint, in Paris, during the last century. But Dr. Campbell has shewn, that more diseases were induced at the tomb than even the pretended cures; that the cases of pretence were few; that in these imposture was detected; that they were such as might have been cured by natural means; that none were instantaneous; that the use of medicines was not discontinued; that the pretended cures were incomplete and temporary, for the diseases returned. To all these, the miracles of Christ present a striking and glorious contrast; so far from bringing discredit on the works of our Redeemer, they serve more fully to exhibit their splendour and certainty.

Thus we have seen that Jesus Christ could be actuated by no worldly end; that to attest his doctrine was of the highest consequence to the interests of mankind, while that doctrine stood opposed to the strongest passions and prejudices of the Jews. He appears, therefore, fair and unimpeached in his own person. His miracles were original, instantaneous, performed in the presence of numerous and competent witnesses; they were manifestly above all natural power; yet

they were sensible, and such as could not be mistaken or misunderstood; and they were of great number and variety. The conclusion is most rational and satisfactory, "No man can do these miracles which thou doest, except God be with him."

I envy not the man who has no perception of the charm and beauty, as well as the majesty and power of the works of Christ. I confess that whenever I meet a funeral procession, and look upon the countenance of the mother, who can always be distinguished by her expression of anguish, or by her tears, I feel that, to stop the bier, and restore the son to the maternal bosom, is ineffably sublime in mercy. The finest sympathies of my nature are awakened at the idea, and I cannot but feel that this is a work worthy not merely of a prophet sent from God, but of incarnate Deity himself. It would be easy to illustrate this at large by a reference to particular cases.

III. But we proceed, in the third place, to a consideration of the proof which miracles supply of a divine mission.

It is exceedingly difficult to prove, or even to illustrate a self-evident proposition. The man who should attempt to shew that the sun is not the source of darkness, but of light, would be at a loss in what form to construct his syllogism, or how to conduct his argument: his best appeal would be to the senses and the common reason of mankind. And in like manner the proof of a divine mission from miracles may safely be left to the common sense and understanding of men. If the miracle be beyond doubt, the mission of which it is the signature and attestation, is established. Yet the following observations may serve in some degree to illustrate the case.

First, Jesus Christ appealed to his miracles as

a proof of his divine mission. The disciples of John the Baptist came to him proposing this inquiry, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? And *in the same hour* he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and to many that were blind he gave sight;—Then Jesus answering them, said, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up; and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me." To his enemies he said, "The works which my Father hath given me to do, *they* bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me." Of his opponents and revilers he said, "If I had not done among them the *works* which none other man did, they had not had sin." To his Apostles he said, "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me, or else believe me *for the very works' sake*." This is therefore the proof to which on all occasions he appealed, and which he considered satisfactory and decisive.

Secondly, The witnesses regarded them in this light; many of them were convinced, and glorified God. We are told by the Evangelists, that after the performance of the miracles of Christ, "there came a fear on all." They said, "We have seen strange things to-day." "God hath visited his people." "A great Prophet is risen up among us." "John did no miracle; but all things which John spake of this man were true." The success of the ministry of Christ, to which his miracles greatly contributed, has been strangely underrated and misconceived. Twelve men totally abandoned their worldly occupations and followed him; he afterwards sent forth seventy persons to work wonders in his name; he had disciples in almost

all places whither he went. To this extent were his miracles successful, thus far they accomplished their purpose; they overcame not, indeed, the inveterate obduration and the desperate malignity of the infatuated among the Jews; but these were the only things which they did not overcome.

Thirdly, The most distinguished infidels admit that a real miracle is decisive proof of a divine mission. Their objection regards not so much the nature or validity of the attestation as its reality. Spinoza himself, according to Mr. Bayle, said to his friends, "that if he could be convinced of the resurrection of Lazarus, he would break his whole system into pieces, and readily embrace the common faith of Christians." And it is the aim of Mr. Hume not so much to evince that miracles, if admitted to be true, are not sufficient evidence of a divine mission, as to shew that no miracles have ever been wrought. Prove a miracle, and this giant in the sceptical warfare, by his own shewing, is laid low.

Fourthly, The reason is very simple, but at the same time most powerful and cogent; it rests on the natural justice, wisdom, and veracity of God. He would not lend his energy to sanction a lie, or to aid an imposture; he would not give his signature to error and delusion, in order that mankind might be afflicted with deeper blindness, and led into more fatal and hopeless obscuration. If his energy be exerted, it must be to sanction truth; if his signature be any where affixed, it can only be to pure and unmixed truth. A miracle, therefore, is a sufficient proof of a divine mission. The argument may be put in a syllogistic form;

God would not work a miracle to sanction any thing but truth;

But he wrought miracles by Jesus Christ:

The things which Jesus Christ taught are therefore true.

"No man can do these miracles which thou doest, except God be with him." The appeal is to the natural perfections of Deity and the common understanding of men, and it is final and conclusive.

Fifthly, No better mode of establishing among men the belief of a divine mission has ever been suggested. After mature reflection and attentive consideration of all the known and possible methods of demonstration, I am, I confess, unable to suggest any one that would be an improvement upon this; nor have I, so far as my philosophical inquiries have extended, met with even a hint for accomplishing the purpose with more dignity, or ease, or certainty. I have heard of no other plan more becoming the majesty of God, or better adapted to the circumstances of man.

I conclude, therefore, that miracles are satisfactory proof of a divine mission. Jesus Christ appealed to his miracles; they produced conviction in many, and those most competent witnesses; even sceptics admit that they are decisive, if they can be proved to be true; the reason is simple and powerful, founded on the natural and moral perfections of God; no better method has yet been suggested, or we may venture to assert will ever be devised.

Moreover, it is an easy mode of proof. It requires no learning, no acuteness of mind to comprehend it; nothing is necessary but an acquaintance with the common course of things, and a sound understanding. It is, therefore, adapted to the universal state of human nature.

It is also an impressive and awakening proof,

When a miracle is wrought, the Deity comes near to us; we feel his presence; we are startled and aroused as from sleep; we are filled with awe; the keenest sensibilities of our nature are touched; and, unless our moral perceptions are strangely blunted by sin, or vitiated by malignant unbelief, we solemnly adore the power, and intuitively admit the proof as final and absolute.

IV. In the fourth place, let us examine the arguments which have been urged against it.

And although the pretensions of infidels are proud and lofty, and have often been ostentatiously paraded, yet will they be found reducible to a small compass, and capable of easy exposure and triumphant refutation.

And first, It is said that the very idea of a miracle is absurd, and more properly matter of derision than of argument. But this must depend somewhat on the state of a man's mental vision; I confess I am totally unable to perceive the absurdity, it eludes my discernment; and as this is a mere assertion, it may be properly met by another. The very idea of a miracle is beautiful and striking in the highest degree; in circumstances of due importance and necessity, it is most reasonable, conducive alike to the glory of God and the good of men; and I do not hesitate to affirm, that the common feeling of human nature is in favour of this assertion, and against that of the sceptic.

It is most certain that the creation of the world was a stupendous and complicated exertion of omnipotence, by which a most astonishing change was effected in the antecedent state of things; and, in order to make it manifest that any deviation from the laws which were then established is absurd, the

following propositions should be proved: that the power which formed the universe does not now exist; that, in the race of beings for whom the Creator originally made the world, adorned it with beauty, and replenished it with goodness, he has no longer any interest; that a revelation of truth, by which their sanctity and happiness may be promoted, is inconsistent with his perfections; or that if such a revelation were made, he would not affix to it the signature of his power and the sanction of his authority. But the very reverse of all this can be proved, by an appeal to reason, and to principles independent of the sacred Scriptures. The Supreme Power still exists; the Deity is interested in the happiness of man, the object of his original bounty and care; a revelation, considering the circumstances in which mankind were involved, was in a high degree probable; and miracles are the best proof and attestation of a divine mission which we can imagine. The idea of a miracle is therefore perfectly rational, and in every respect agreeable to the human intellect.

But, secondly, It is said that those who pretended to work these miracles imposed upon the people, by availing themselves of favourable circumstances, and by the skilful application of secondary causes. This objection has been already, in some degree, answered: but admitting it to be just and valid, they must then have had a profound acquaintance with the secrets of philosophy, a surprising penetration into the agencies of nature. What an astonishing knowledge of all the complicated operations of the elements is implied, upon this supposition, in the works which they are asserted to have performed; and how does this agree with the ignorance and enthusiasm, the folly and absurdity, which it is found convenient, on other

occasions, to ascribe to the founders of Christianity! What opinion must we form of the men, and their system, who, as it may suit the exigency of the moment, represent their opponents at the extremes of ignorance and wisdom;—at one time mere objects of derision, at another, possessing knowledge which transcends all ancient and modern science!

Besides, if the miracles of christianity were of such easy execution, why are they not attempted again? With all the advantages of this enlightened age, why do not those who assert their facility perform a few of the same kind? It would be a novel and highly interesting sight to behold an apostle of infidelity traversing our streets, to heal all manner of sickness and disease among the people, to give sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf, and life to the dead, not by miracle, but by the skilful application of ordinary causes. Truly it would be an edifying spectacle, and one that would almost justify undertaking a journey even on foot from the most remote part of the kingdom to Portsmouth, there to behold a modern sceptic satisfying the appetite of some thousands of hungry people seated in ranks upon Portsdown, with a few loaves and fishes; and after he had dismissed them, and descended into the plain, on arriving at the water's edge, calmly committing himself to the waves, and walking across in the midst of a tempest to the Isle of Wight, to astonish the simple natives by the repetition of his wonders; and all performed merely by means of a skilful application of secondary causes, and with a design to exhibit the powers of philosophy, and to confirm the speculative dogmas of a cold and cheerless system of infidelity. Alas! that these philosophers are not ashamed of their own absurdities; that they should labour to involve themselves in darkness,

and think thereby to quench the light of heaven, and to eclipse the reason, and extinguish the sight of all other men.

Thirdly, It is alleged that no testimony is adequate to establish the truth of a miracle. This assertion is exceedingly hardy and adventurous; it could scarcely have been anticipated that scepticism itself would have proceeded to this length: but it is the doctrine of the most distinguished writer on that side of the question. This is the sum of the argument: we have had no experience of a miracle, we have never witnessed any inversion of the common course of things; there is, therefore, strong probability against any such inversion having taken place in past ages, such a probability as no proof from testimony can overcome.

It is truly astonishing that men pretending to more than ordinary penetration, should argue in this manner. It can hardly be deemed a sophism or a subtilty, although it is the main principle of Mr. Hume's celebrated Essay: it is a palpable absurdity, against which the common feelings and convictions of mankind rise up in resistance and indignation; for, if I am not to believe testimony to a miracle, on the ground of the improbability and rareness of the event, and my having had no experience of such an event, on the same ground I must reject testimony in all similar cases. Nothing more is necessary than that the event should be to my apprehension improbable, and that I should have had no experience of such an event, to justify my disbelief, rejection and derision of the testimony by which it is affirmed. On this principle, the inhabitants of Calcutta never can believe in the frosts of Norway, and the Norwegians never can believe in the heat of Hindoostan. Their experiences are in direct contrariety and opposition; no tes-

timony can overcome the reciprocal improbabilities; and they must remain in everlasting unbelief of a clear matter of fact; nay, in positive denial and contradiction of it, unless they personally visit each other's country.

On the same ground, the truth of all history must be abandoned; for it is full of events of which we have had no experience, and of improbabilities which have no sufficient basis of belief but testimony; and this, according to the argument, is no basis at all.

Why will men wantonly and wilfully maintain such perversities? Why will they call light darkness and darkness light? For the absolute and direct reverse of the proposition is the true principle; that events of which we have had no experience, and which are in themselves in the highest degree improbable, are to be received as true upon adequate testimony.

This maxim was never called in question till Mr. Hume arose, and it may be fairly doubted whether even he really called it in question. He is said to have betrayed the literary secret of Rousseau: that wayward and perverse, but brilliant genius, sent forth his paradoxes, if he really made the supposed confession, as the sport of fancy, and as an experiment upon the credulity of mankind. I can believe that Mr. Hume was amazed at his own audacity, and at the astonishment which he created in the world; but he never could have been the dupe of his own sophistries. He believed in testimony as mankind ever have done, and ever will do, otherwise why did he write his history? or who will credit a word of it? or who will not deny that such a man ever lived?

Is this then the philosophy so lofty in its pretensions, so profound in its penetration, that only a few rare and uncommon spirits can attain unto it! It cuts

off all the past; it shuts up all the future; it mocks at another world; and reduces man to the condition of an animal just conscious of his present life, and that is all. For if I have no confidence in the testimony of other men, why should I have any in my own recollections?

If this notion were supported by all the forms of argument, and all the subtilties of logic, if it came recommended by the most powerful reasoning, and arrayed in the most captivating imagery; and I could not detect its weakness and fallacy, still I should be sure that it was false. It belies my nature; it confronts my intuitions. I shall ever believe in testimony from the necessity of my being, and, as Mr. Hume did, in spite of myself and my own paradoxes.

But, fourthly, It is said that the testimony which supports the miracles of Jesus Christ is inadequate. Happily, in this branch of the argument, the criteria of true and false miracles are laid down by Mr. Hume himself: "We entertain," he says, "a suspicion of any matter of fact, when the witnesses contradict each other, when they are but few, or of doubtful character, when they have an interest in what they affirm, when they deliver their testimony with hesitation, or, on the contrary, with too violent asseverations."

Now, I desire any man, who has a competent knowledge of the case, to ask his own heart, if there is not an exact concord and agreement among the witnesses to the miracles of Christ; if their number is not ample and superabundant; if their moral character does not elevate them far above suspicion; if they could have had any worldly interest in what they affirmed; if they did not deliver their testimony with most consummate courage, dignity, and wisdom, with unparalleled

meekness and suavity, even in the face of cruelty, vengeance, and death.

And after all his boasting, this great champion resigns the argument, and quits the field: "For," says he, "when any one tells me that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself whether it be more probable that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact which he relates should really have happened. I weigh the one miracle against the other; and according to the superiority which I discover, I pronounce my decision, and always reject the greater miracle. If the falsehood of his testimony would be more miraculous than the event which he relates, then, and not till then, can he pretend to command my belief or opinion."

Let us place the question on this ground. The testimony of the Apostles is true, or it is false; if it be true, the miracles are admitted, if it be false, we have then an incomparably greater miracle. For a number of men, calm, dispassionate, devout, of unimpeached integrity, inculcating the strictest moral principle, attest them with undeviating firmness and dignity, through all obloquy and sufferings, even to death. Here, then, is a suspension, an inversion of the laws of mind, incomparably transcending any thing that is alleged concerning the violation of the laws of matter. Mr. Hume must accept the greater miracle or the less; he accepts the less, and thus completely destroys his own argument.

And in truth, there is no testimony for any one fact of antiquity to be compared with that which supports the miracles of Jesus Christ;—testimony so circumstantial, so unvarying, so public, delivered in such diversity of situations, or by men of equal competence and character. And I do not hesitate to avow that I

have as much confidence in the testimony of the Apostles, as in my own senses; and my persuasion of the truth would not be more certain, though my apprehension of the facts would be more vivid, if I had seen them with my own eyes, and heard them with my own ears.

It must be remembered, also, that there is no opposing or contradictory testimony; no one ever came forward to bear witness against the events;—to attest that, at the time and place specified, he being then and there present, these events did not transpire. We have nothing against the testimony of the Apostles, but the assertions of men who lived at a much later period. And the question is, shall I believe Peter, or Paul, or John, who affirm that they saw and heard these facts, and who spent their subsequent life in propagating their testimony; or shall I believe a modern sceptic, who, though he does not pretend to have been present on the occasions, or alive at the time referred to, takes upon him to deny the truth of their statements? I must believe either the testimony of the Apostles, or the denial of the infidel. Which of these alternatives will a wise man accept?

The case under consideration is not unlike that which occurred after our Lord's resurrection. On the one hand, the soldiers who were appointed to watch the sepulchre, affirm that his dead body was stolen at a time when, by their own confession, they were asleep; thus deposing to a fact which occurred (if it really did occur) whilst they were in a state of unconsciousness: and, on the other hand, the witnesses of his resurrection solemnly aver that they actually saw him alive after his passion, and received many infallible proofs of the fact. Here, it must be allowed, was contradictory testimony. But as all reasonable

men will continue to believe the testimony of the Apostles, notwithstanding the tale of the soldiers, so will they believe the statements of the Evangelists concerning the miracles of Christ, notwithstanding the counter-statement of any *modern* sceptic, who is precluded from the possibility of being a competent witness in the case. And what if all men did not see and hear these miraculous facts? There were twelve credible men who both saw and heard them, and I shall abandon their testimony and that of my own senses at the same time.

Lastly, It is objected, that distance of time and place has diminished its force, and destroyed its efficacy. But Constantinople is more remote than Jerusalem, and Pekin in China, than either; and yet we have no difficulty in believing events which transpired at these places upon such vague testimony as common rumour, or the reports of our journalists. But what shall we say to distance of time? Does then any one doubt the retreat of the ten thousand Greeks recorded by Xenophon, or the character of Pompey, and the exploits of Julius Cæsar, though they preceded the nativity of Jesus Christ? Are we less certain of the existence of King Alfred than of Queen Elizabeth, or of Elizabeth than of George the First? Are not these facts all alike certain? Would not every man be deemed a simpleton or a maniac who should doubt any of these events, or pretend that they were invested with different degrees of certainty according to their chronological position, and not all indisputably entitled to the most confident belief?

Now the four gospels have precisely the same and even more internal marks of genuineness, and external attestations of authenticity, than any one book of profane history. No candid man, who is acquainted

with the literature of those times, will deny this: there is no one acquainted with the subsequent history of the church, and the manner in which the four gospels have been transmitted to us, but will acknowledge it to be most incontrovertible. The memorial is as fresh and luminous to us, as it was to our forefathers; and it will be transmitted in unimpaired freshness and glory to the last generation of mankind. It will retain its purity and lustre, its pathos and wisdom, and all its divine signatures, to the conflagration of the world.

Thus have we shewn what a miracle is; the distinctive and glorious features of the miracles of Jesus Christ; the proof which they supply of a divine mission;—that the idea of a miracle is highly rational; that the notion of imposture is totally inconsistent with other charges which have been brought against the persons by whom these miracles were wrought, and that it is impossible they should be repeated; that adequate testimony can establish the truth of any extraordinary event; that the testimony in this case is most full and perfect and unparalleled; that it retains its freshness, and lustre, and efficacy, and, from its own inherent truth and vigour, must continue to do so to the end of time.

We arrive, therefore, at this conclusion, that Jesus Christ came by divine commission, and taught truth by the appointment and authority of God. But what truth! Forgiveness of sin, acceptance with the Father, instantaneous felicity at death, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, an everlasting life of dignity and blessedness in ineffable communion with the Father and the Son, the moral splendour and magnificence of the consummation of all things. Oh! how vast the conclusion! how extensive its in-

fluence! how rich its glory! how overpowering its weight and splendour! Then I am immortal, destined to emerge into fairer light, in a happier world. Then there is certainly coming a day which will unravel every mystery, reveal the noontide effulgence of divine wisdom and equity, accomplish all the great purposes of redemption, justify and glorify God's universal administration.

But had the evidence been unsatisfactory, had the conclusion been opposite, how deep had been the darkness, how dreadful the gloom! Then not one ray of holy light would shoot across the midnight of the world; for if Christ be not the way, the truth, and the life, there is no way, or truth, or life.

But every miracle, every prophecy, every doctrine and precept of light and purity is a separate proof. The evidence is not only multiplied and diversified, it is also strictly cumulative; and he who enters the field of revelation with unprejudiced mind, will find the demonstration of its truth as various, as powerful, as overwhelming, as that which presents itself to him who walks abroad amid the scenes of nature, for the manifestation of nature's God.

If the mission of Jesus Christ be established, the whole Bible stands with it. He gave his sanction to the Old Testament; Apostles preached by his authority; and the same reasons which support the truth of his miracles, will apply in full force to the miracles which preceded his coming, and to those which were accomplished subsequently to his ascension and glory.

My brethren in the ministry, we stand on a solid rock: let us preach the word with all authority; let us assert the truth with all boldness; let us triumph in the near prospect of the day when all false religion and all infidelity shall be consumed from the earth,

when the glory of the Lord Jesus and his miracles shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

My young friends, our religion is founded in reason; it is upheld by invincible argument. Walk around Zion, and behold her bulwarks, and tell her towers. We appeal to your understanding; let your judgment be well informed and fully satisfied before you suffer your feelings to be enkindled. But when once conviction of the truth of christianity has been produced in your mind, let no ingenuity or sophistry of man wrest it from you, but triumphantly exclaim, in the language of the poet,

> "Should all the forms which men devise
> Assault my faith with treacherous art;
> I'd call them vanity and lies,
> And bind the gospel to my heart."

If any one is doubtful, let me urge him to examine the evidence. It is astonishing infatuation to remain in doubt on such a subject, if certainty can be attained. Mighty is your gain if the gospel be true; no language can express your loss if it be false. Behold then, in miracles, the authentication of its divine origin; believe and enjoy the benefit.

But divine truth is not like the experiments of science, or the theorems of mathematics, in which you merely see the proof and assent to the conclusions. In this case you may yield to the demonstration, and yet not perceive the glory or enjoy the consolation of the doctrine which it establishes. The personal advantage and happiness depend on moral feeling and character. The heart must be regenerated and made holy, and the truth will then break in upon the mind with surprising power; it will appear refulgent in the colours of heaven, and replenish you with ineffable satisfaction.

My brethren, it is no small benefit to be delivered from the darkness and discomfort of positive unbelief, to have a speculative apprehension of the truth of christianity; but this will neither sanctify nor save the soul. Very remarkable is the answer which our divine Saviour gave to the Jewish ruler, when he expressed the sentiment contained in the text. He quits, in a moment, the subject of miracles for that of regeneration: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Ye must be born again. You may believe miracles and yet be undone. If any man be in Christ, there is a new creation.

May the word of God be quick and powerful in our hearts, and may the Spirit of God baptize us with his abiding unction. Amen.

LECTURE V.

THE EVIDENCE DERIVED FROM THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST.

By W. WALFORD.

"Probability is the very guide of life."—*Butler's Analogy.*

LECTURE V.

THE EVIDENCE DERIVED FROM THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST.

JOHN i. 14.

We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

THE evidence by which the truth of the christian religion is supported, is usually styled moral or probable. Moral evidence essentially differs from that which is demonstrative, inasmuch as it admits various degrees of proof, from the slightest probability to the highest certainty. There is another difference between these kinds of evidence, which is closely connected with the reception or rejection of the truth of christianity, and which, on this account, demands our present notice. Demonstrative evidence does not at all depend for its reception upon the previous state or sentiments of the heart; it compels belief, whether its object be agreeable or displeasing: but moral evidence depends very much for its effect upon the temper of the heart, so that an unpleasant and disagreeable truth may require a higher degree of evidence to induce belief, than one which is in unison with the feelings, and which it may be very pleasant to have rendered perfectly certain. Thus, in all cases of a moral nature, the understanding is

liable to be influenced by the character of the affections, and the declaration of scripture, which affirms, that "every one which doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved," is seen to be in entire agreement with our mental constitution, and the necessary exercise of our intellectual faculties. The different manner in which the evidence of christian truth has, in every age, been received by different persons, would be a problem of difficult solution, were it not for the distinction which has now been noticed between demonstrative and moral evidence. This distinction bears powerfully on all the classes of evidence to which christianity appeals for its truth; and on none perhaps more than on that which it is the object of this discourse to investigate, which is,—The Evidence to be derived from the Character of Christ.

The character of the divine Redeemer was displayed equally to the persons who welcomed, and to those who rejected his claims. But how different were the effects which this display produced! "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not." "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." The amount of these statements is, that the character of Christ proved him to be the divine and long-expected Saviour, in whom all the stores of wisdom and knowledge are treasured up; but that, in consequence of the previous dispositions by which the persons were actuated to whom that character was displayed, some of them welcomed him as "the Son of God and the King of Israel," while to others he appeared in the light

of "a root out of a dry ground, altogether without form or comeliness, that they should desire him." The annals of the propagation of christianity offer to our contemplation reiterated results of a similar nature, and a long experience forbids the hope that any consequence, materially different, will be produced by the efforts of the christian ministry in the present age. If the manifestation of the Son of God, invested, as he was, with beauty surpassing the sons of men, failed to produce conviction in the multitudes who were indulged with it, what may the preacher, who now addresses you, justly look for, from his feeble endeavours to delineate that unparalleled excellence? Modern times have witnessed the most cogent reasonings in favour of christianity; the advocates of this heavenly cause have ornamented their statements of its claims with all the charms of a lucid and perspicuous style—have arrayed them in the splendour of a pure and persuasive eloquence; but, alas! in how many cases have their arguments failed to pierce that profound darkness in which the love of sensual delights, or the torpid influence of a sceptical indifference and a specious infidelity, have enveloped the understandings of mankind! These are considerations which often press heavily on the ministers of religion, and prevent their giving way to any sanguine expectations of success. But we must persevere; we leave the issue of our exertions in His hands, who fashioneth the hearts of men according to his good pleasure, and amidst every discouragement assures us, that "his word shall not return unto him void, but shall accomplish that which he pleases, and prosper in the thing whereto he sends it."

Before I proceed to the direct subject of this dis-

course, I beg to observe, that we have no documents illustrative of the character of our Lord Jesus Christ, but the narratives which have been left to us by his disciples; and it may possibly be thought, that this forms a sufficient reason to invalidate a testimony, which, it may be said, is partial and inconclusive. In noticing this objection, I must observe, that the argument, by which the veracity of the sacred historians is rendered unimpeachable, is far too extensive to be now discussed, and would lead us astray from the particular theme which requires our attention. No writers, certainly, have ever given equal proof of truth and sincerity by the artless simplicity of their style, and by the sacrifices which they voluntarily made in support of their testimony: but there is one reply to be made to this objection, which, in my judgment, is quite satisfactory; namely, the utter improbability—I might say, the moral impossibility—of Christ's disciples framing the conception of such a character as that which they have attributed to their Master. This character stands alone: the records of history and the fictions of imagination are alike without power to supply an archetype, whence the resemblance could be drawn. The disciples of Jesus, too, were plain, uneducated, illiterate men: they were, moreover, Jews; and the portrait which they have drawn of their Master is remote from the prepossessions, and irreconcileably at variance with the corrupt and inveterate sentiments of a people, ever most remarkable for the tenacity with which they have clung to their national feelings, and to the traditions which they received from their ancestors. The hypothesis is absolutely untenable, that the Evangelists either could or would have delineated such a character, had not the living person in whom it was embodied been placed

before their view. The justice of this observation will be confirmed by a brief sketch of the prominent features of that illustrious character, to which I now invite your attention. These features are, its *moral perfection*, and its *transcendant wisdom*. To exhibit completely the *moral perfection* of our Lord's character, would be to transcribe a very large proportion of the narratives which are contained in the four gospels. This I shall not attempt to do; but shall confine myself to remark, that the Evangelists express in the amplest manner his entire devotedness to the will and to the glory of God—his absolute freedom from all selfish and secular affections, together with the meekness, patience, and benignity which regulated his whole deportment to mankind. That these qualities form the substance of our Saviour's moral perfection, and ornament it with pre-eminent lustre, almost every page of the sacred history witnesses. "That he was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners;" that he sought no fading renown; coveted no earthly dignities; employed the stupendous power with which he was manifestly invested, for none but public and benevolent purposes; that he requited evil only with good; that he laboured amidst self-denials and voluntary poverty to secure human welfare; that he shrunk from no difficulties, nor turned aside from any perils which crossed his path; that he preserved his kindness to man, and his zeal for God, unimpaired, under the pressure of most appalling indignities, privations, and sufferings; and that he maintained the elevation of his character, and the strength of his devotedness to the service of truth, until the last moment of his existence on earth; are traits in our Lord's character, which, during all subsequent ages, have attracted the reverence and love of

his disciples, and have extorted the admiration and eulogies of his adversaries.

The *transcendant wisdom*, by which our Saviour was distinguished, forms a part of his character, not less illustrious than his moral perfection. He informed his disciples, that in the course of the ministry to which they were destined, they must combine "the wisdom of the serpent with the innocence of the dove;" and he, in his own person, placed before them this combination in the most engaging form. The Evangelists have recorded such incidents in the life of their Master, as it is difficult to peruse, without a lively sentiment of the "meekness of wisdom," which presided over all his various intercourse with mankind. He was beset on every side with difficulties, originating in the ignorance and prejudices of his followers; the inveterate bigotry and pride of his countrymen; and the subtle, persevering, and inhuman character of his enemies. The manner in which our Lord conducted his converse with these parties is so well known, as to render any enlarged statement of it superfluous: his biographers supply us with the amplest details relative to this topic; and I shall only remark respecting it, that the kindness, forbearance, and discrimination, which he extended to the misapprehensions and errors of his disciples, are not more remarkable than the acuteness with which he exposed the sophistry of his opponents; the force with which he repelled their captious queries; and the prudence by which he guarded himself and his actions against all their disingenuous and insidious misrepresentations.

The doctrines which our Saviour taught, and the manner in which he discharged the office of a public instructor, present us with instances equally decisive of the wisdom by which he was so eminently

distinguished. The instructions of Christ relative to the nature, the will, and the worship of God, are pure, spiritual, and in the highest degree sublime. He unfolded the truths which belong to human interests, duties, and expectations, with such clearness of evidence and force of authority, as absolutely to exclude all questioning or reply. His doctrine is equally remote from a severity that would generate despair, and expel from the human heart every hope of obtaining forgiveness, and securing the favour of God; and from a licentiousness, that would prostrate the moral perfection of the Governor of the universe before the sensual, and selfish, and secular passions of the depraved children of men. What teacher of religion ever drew such a picture of divine benignity as Christ delineated in the melting heart of that indulgent parent, who ran to welcome to his arms, with the tenderest accents of compassion, his profligate and wretched, but returning and repenting prodigal? From whose lips, but from those of the divine Redeemer, ever flowed so persuasive, so overwhelming a representation of the love of God towards a guilty race, as is contained in the well-known words, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life; for God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved?" And lest proud and ungrateful men should desecrate these charming lessons, and pervert them to purposes of impiety, who, like Christ, has set in array the holiness and majesty of the supreme Benefactor? or denounced, in terms so piercing, the hypocrisy which, under the semblance of confiding in the divine mercy, would involve itself in a covering that should veil its

deformity, and conceal its odious shape? "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 which is in heaven."

The sole additional instance of the wisdom of Christ, as a teacher of religion, to which I shall advert, is the truth, the candour, the kindness, the humility, and ceaseless forbearance which he enjoined upon his disciples; and of which he made his own life, his sufferings, and his death the great example, and the powerful motive. These are the remedies which the Physician of souls prescribed, in order to heal the wounds, dry up the tears, and banish the endless miseries of the world. Who can peruse the chapter in which Christ pronounces the beatitudes of his kingdom, without experiencing a profound sentiment of admiration, at the wisdom of a Teacher, who, in terms so simple and so affecting, subverts the whole system of Jewish expectations, and the entire theory of Pharisaic morals? The benedictions which he uttered, wear, at first view, a form somewhat paradoxical; but, when carefully examined, shew themselves to be the most finished and perfect results of a wisdom truly celestial and divine. The crimes and miseries of man have ever consisted in his love of worldly elevation, and his incessant cravings after distinction, aggrandizement, power, and pleasure. For the attainment of such objects, the rights of men, and the claims of God, have been alike disregarded and set at nought. To extirpate the misery which has overspread the world, and utterly to extinguish the crimes which have produced it; the divine Redeemer "opened his mouth, and taught his disciples, saying: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven: blessed are they that mourn, for they

shall be comforted: blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth:" and in similar terms, he couches the injunctions, which discriminate his kingdom from the kingdoms of this world. Just in proportion as these injunctions are complied with, is the establishment and increase of human happiness attained; nor can suffering humanity expect that happiness to be completed, sooner than every soul of man is purified and renovated by these sovereign remedies, and the Prince of Peace is enthroned in every human heart. "Even so. Come, Lord Jesus! come quickly."

I must now remind you, that the evidence to the truth of the christian religion, which is deducible from the character of our Redeemer, is, as was observed at the commencement of this discourse, strictly moral. An inquiry of the following kind arises, therefore, relative to the subject which is before us:—Is it probable, or likely, that in the circumstances, and at the time in which Christ appeared, such a character as his, was, or could be formed, by means altogether human, and such as are exclusive of a supernatural and divine agency? Or, which amounts to the same thing, was the character of Christ from heaven or of men? Upon the solution of this inquiry, depends the evidence for the truth of christianity, which is deducible from this source. It is demanded, then, what is the fair and probable account to be given, respecting the formation of a character, so supereminent in *moral perfection* as that, by which our Lord Jesus Christ was distinguished? I reply, that according to all the rules of a just and impartial reasoning, it is infinitely improbable that such a character originated in any thing short of an agency strictly divine, and that no other conclusion can, with any appearance of reason, be drawn. If there be any

difficulty in the case, it must lie, not in the conclusion which is drawn from the fact, but must arise entirely from inattention to the perfect singularity of that fact; or from a disbelief of the truth of its existence. For what is the fact? It is, that among the incalculable multitudes of the human race, no individual is to be found, in any age or region, free from the blemishes of moral imperfection, but he alone who claims to be regarded as the Son of God, in co-existence with the seed of the woman. It would be a superfluous labour to enter here, upon the proof of what lies prominent upon the surface of all history, ancient and modern, public and private; and is demonstrated by all observation, and all consciousness, that men are universally the subjects of moral deficiency: so that "there is none righteous, no not one." Now, the christian assumption is, that all this is true; but that in the midst of these innumerable myriads of transgressors, one Person has appeared, altogether free from the stains, by which the entire species is polluted, and adorned with a perfection of character, which renders him the living resemblance and express image of the Deity: a Person, of whom his disciples aver, that "he did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." Whence then did this character, we ask, originate? Was it from heaven or of men? If the reply be, it was of men; then we have the revolting absurdity, of an effect produced by causes which were never known to have given rise to such an effect; but which, having operated during thousands of years, and in millions of cases, have uniformly, and without deviation, produced effects of a nature directly the reverse. No man can credit this. It is not in the power of the human understanding, so to stultify itself, as to come to such a conclusion. We are, therefore, inevitably

compelled to determine, on the contrary, that the character of Christ was from heaven; and that the reason why the evidence arising out of that character, fails to produce conviction, results, either from inattention to the perfect singularity of the case, or to a disbelief of the fact, that any such character has ever existed. We shall leave out of our present consideration the inattentive, as parties who have no right to be heard; and to those persons who question the truth of the sacred history, and deny, as all unbelievers must consistently do, the existence of any such character, as that which is ascribed to our Lord Jesus Christ, we recommend the determination of such inquiries as follow. Whence did the disciples of Christ draw their conception of the character of their Master? For they have not, let it be remembered, they have not confined themselves to a brief and summary assertion of his perfection: they have largely and minutely detailed the principles by which he was actuated, and the application of those principles to all the inexpressibly trying situations in which he was placed. Whence, we ask, did they frame their idea of so pure, so illustrious, so transcendant a virtue? No specimens of the kind had ever been exhibited on the theatre of human action: no sages, or philosophers of the most polished nations, had ever pourtrayed such a character. And are we to abandon ourselves to the irrational conclusion, that what had never been effected by the genius, the taste, and the cultivation of oriental or western philosophy, was achieved by a few individuals, taken from the lowest classes of the Jewish people? These people, the Jews, at the period to which the evangelical history relates, formed a nation the least polished by literature, and proverbially the most attached of all the nations of

the earth, to the system which they had received from their ancestors. This system had, indeed, been originally of celestial origin; but was so vitiated in its transmission, as to have degenerated into a superstition, which, while it depressed their intellectual vigour, nearly extinguished their moral sensibility; and rendered them, not only incapable of the conception of such a character, as that of the divine Redeemer, but impelled them to pursue, with unexampled rancour, to death, and to posterity, the person and the cause of Him, in whom it was exhibited. When this inquiry has been duly prosecuted, and satisfactorily answered, we shall recommend to the attentive review of unbelievers, another, to the following effect: Whence did the disciples of Christ derive their ardent attachment to the Saviour, whose character they have drawn, and their devotedness to a cause, which they must have known to be fallacious, if they had never witnessed the virtues and excellencies which they have ascribed to their Master? The consequences which followed the first adherents to the cause of Christ are too palpable to admit of any question. Proscription and poverty, infamy and pain, ceaseless persecution and excruciating death, pursued them, as their sole reward, on this side the grave. No account can be given, in the least degree satisfactory to any reasonable inquirer, of the establishment and progress of christianity, without an admission of the labours and sufferings to which the servants of Christ voluntarily subjected themselves, in consequence of their devotedness to his cause. We shall in vain attempt to trace their acquiescence in such a lot, to any other sources, than their personal assurance of the reality of the character which they have delineated in their writings, and their absolute conviction of the facts, to which they bore

their constant and unwavering testimony. Scepticism has on this topic exhausted its quiver, and shot its keenest darts, but they have fallen pointless to the earth! We shall, therefore, relinquish to those restless and morbid spirits which would remain unsatisfied, "though one rose from the dead," the further discussion of this theme; and adopt for ourselves, as the true and adequate solution of it, the scripture, which forms the text of the present discourse; "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

It remains for us now to inquire, what evidence for the truth of the christian religion arises from *the transcendant wisdom*, by which the character of the divine Redeemer was distinguished. A justly celebrated writer on the Evidences of Christianity, makes an observation, at the commencement of his work, which is very applicable to the class of evidence which we are now to investigate, and which, on this account, I shall borrow from him. His words are, "I desire that in judging of christianity, it may be remembered, that the question lies between this religion and none: for if the christian religion be not credible, no one, with whom we have to do, will support the pretensions of any other." In unison with this remark of Dr. Paley's, I would observe, that if the wisdom which Christ displayed, be insufficient to support the heavenly origin of his character, we may abandon every conception of divine interference for the instruction and improvement of mankind. Numerous pretences have been made in different ages to a celestial inspiration, and a divine character; but not one has been able to abide the test of inquiry, nor can an advocate be found among the unbelievers of christendom to patronize the claims of Ammonian or Delphic inspirations; not a

single champion for the supernatural wisdom of Socrates or Numa; not a voice raised for Zoroaster, or Confucius, or Mohammed. The wisdom of the Son of God alone survives the prying scrutiny of modern infidelity, and maintains its heavenly origin undaunted before the investigations of the learned, the cavils of the sceptical, and the scoffings of the licentious. The wisdom of Christ bears its credentials inscribed upon all its features, and associates the evidence of its celestial birth with every manifestation of its pure, beneficent, and healing character. "Never man," said his adversaries, "spake like this man." When "Jesus sat down to teach the people," "his doctrine dropped as the rain, his speech distilled as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: for he published the name of Jehovah, he ascribed greatness unto our God."

Was this wisdom from heaven, or of men? "The wisdom which is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy." Let this test, the accuracy of which, no one qualified to engage in this inquiry will hesitate to admit, be applied, in order to furnish a definitive reply. Every characteristic of such a heavenly origin will be found in the life of Christ, and in the doctrine which he delivered. The pages of the evangelical history every where present a direct contrast to the selfish, bigotted, hypocritical, and worldly maxims which had spread themselves over the entire population of the Jewish nation. These people looked upon themselves as the peculiar favourites of heaven, and held the rest of mankind in supreme contempt. They represented themselves as exclusively wise; "they rested in the law, and made their boast of God, were confident that

they themselves were the guides of the blind, and the light of them which were in darkness," while they were guilty of the most atrocious crimes, "dishonouring God by their breaches of his law, and causing his name to be blasphemed among the Gentiles."

Equally remote from the genius and temper of the Gentile world, was the wisdom which now engages our attention. That part of the human race was infamous for its pride, its cruelty, and its impurity; placed its happiness in luxurious enjoyment, in the gratifications of avarice, ambition, and malevolence, or in the pompous refinements of a baseless and preposterous philosophy. In contradistinction to principles and maxims so pernicious, yet so widely diffused, the Son of God required from his disciples the exercise of a profound humility towards God and men; a purity of conduct, springing out of a heart renovated and spiritualized by an active belief of the truths which he demonstrated; and a prevalent sentiment of the majesty of those motives which he placed before them, drawn from the sanctions of eternal life and everlasting perdition. Jesus Christ taught his followers to deny themselves, to renounce the world, to seek with ardent aspirations after the enjoyment of God, and by their utmost efforts to promote the extension of that reign of peace, beneficence, and universal good-will, the establishment and perpetuity of which he came into the world to effect.

Let now the circumstances in which our Lord appeared in the world, and amidst which his character was formed, be contemplated, and the evidence to the truth of his divine mission, which results from his character, will be as complete as the preacher is able to exhibit it, within the limits of a sermon. The Lord of Christians, who delivered the instructions, and

displayed the character which have been placed before you, was a Jew of obscure station, related to humble artisans, conversant only with persons of similar condition and attainments; excluded from the schools of learning, possessing no means of intellectual advancement, and having before him no examples of enlargement of mind, and emancipation from Jewish prejudices. His early years were spent amidst the labours of his lowly condition, and he emerged at once from his obscurity, perfect in the spotless purity of his moral endowments, and in all that matchless wisdom which baffled his opponents, and rendered his cause triumphant against the utmost exertions of policy, power, and malignant cruelty.

On such grounds we conclude, that the character of Christ was "from heaven, and not of men." Whether this be a just conclusion, fairly drawn from the premises with which it is associated, must be left to the decision of those persons who are not too indolent, or too indifferent, or too much enamoured of the fleeting satisfactions of this short life, to permit them to give their attentive regard to any thing which pertains to their own immortal interests, or to the kingdom of God among men. Sure I am, that it is a case as clear as any which can be submitted to the reason of mankind: and we must, upon any principles which will justify a rejection of it, reject every case which is supported by moral reasonings, and come to a resolution that we will believe nothing, unless we have the evidence of sense or of demonstration for it. How compatible such a resolution will be found, with the principles on which we necessarily act in the business of this life, even the most momentous, I intreat those persons to consider, who are aware, that on moral evidence alone, men are continually engaging in affairs,

which involve in their success or miscarriage the interests of all which they hold dearest in the world. Men are every hour committing their health, their fortunes, their families, and their lives, to measures which depend oftentimes on very slight probabilities, and yet would justly, and generally, be thought to be senseless and irrational, if they failed so to act. Let the considerations, then, which flow from the incomparable excellency of our Redeemer's character, exert their proper influence upon our minds, and we shall soon be disposed devoutly to say, with one of the servants of Christ, "My Lord and my God!" and with another, "To whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life."

I shall trespass on your attention only to offer a few brief and concluding observations.

1. The class of evidence for the truth of the gospel, which we have now considered, requires a suitable state of the mind for its reception. It has already been remarked, that moral evidence differs from demonstrative, inasmuch as it admits of various degrees, and depends greatly for its effect on the state of the feelings and affections. If you wish that christianity may be proved to be true, the kind of proof which has been laid before you will have great weight: but if, through the influence of a temper which is repugnant to its pure and holy nature, it should seem to be your interest that it may appear to be false, experience unhappily proves that it is far from being difficult to produce such an effect. That the evidence which is deducible from the character of Christ, is of a kind calculated to act with great effect upon a disposition truly candid, open, and unprejudiced, is incontrovertible. That it does not in all cases produce this effect, is but too evident, from the multitudes who are captivated

by the bold assertions and the subtle sophisms of professed and practised unbelievers. No satisfactory account can be given of this lamentable fact, but one that bears heavily upon the state and character of the persons who are involved in it. It is a matter too plain to be questioned, that the religion of the Son of God is productive of personal excellence and of public happiness, in proportion as it is believed and acted upon. No man, therefore, who is actuated by pure and benevolent sentiments, can fail earnestly to wish, and devoutly to pray, that it may be speedily and universally extended. Is it too much to affirm, that they who oppose christianity, and endeavour to discredit its truth and character, ought to be regarded as among the most dangerous foes to the true and permanent happiness of their species? They number themselves, it is true, among the generous and high-minded adversaries to superstition and priestly influence, and would persuade the inexperienced and incautious to follow their speculations, as the dictates of superior wisdom and virtue. But it is really difficult, not to say impracticable, to assign any just reason why men, professing themselves to be incapable of discerning the truth, and appreciating the sanctions of the gospel, and who yet, at the same time, avow themselves to be the advocates of morality and benevolence, should attempt to propagate opinions, which are manifestly subversive of the clearest and wisest instructions relative to every moral duty, and which are enforced by the most efficient motives and the most persuasive examples which have ever been addressed to the world. We can perceive in such conduct, little of the benevolence and regard to human welfare which are so much vaunted; and, on the contrary, are warranted to believe, that other affections than the love of

truth, and other objects rather than that of universal happiness, are to be denounced as the sources of it. The well-authenticated characters of the most celebrated opponents of the gospel concur to support this view of the case, and to justify us in the assumption, that humility, candour, the love of truth, and the practice of genuine virtue, will in vain be sought for among the ranks of sceptics and unbelievers. Let us then aim at acquiring that state of the heart, which will prompt us to pursue the knowledge of truth, with an earnestness, and intensity of feeling, proportioned to its supreme and eternal importance. Let us especially beware of that presumptuous confidence in the rectitude of our intentions, and the strength of our understandings, which would lead us to contemn as fanatical, and to neglect as superfluous, that divine illumination, and sanctity of purpose, which the wisest and best of mankind have sought from the living source of all that is good and excellent. If heathens could discover that nothing great was ever achieved without God, is it not incumbent on men calling themselves christians, to pray for the influence of that Spirit, which is ever near to us, that he would subdue every prejudice of our hearts, and overcome every hindrance, which might obstruct us in seeking after the attainment of our highest good? "My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee, so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding: yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding: if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures: then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding."

Under the guidance of such counsel, let our fervent supplications be addressed to "the Father of lights," both for ourselves, and the whole of mankind; "that he may grant us, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might, by his Spirit, in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith; that being rooted and grounded in love, we may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fulness of God."

2. I beg it may carefully be observed, that the subject which has now engaged your attention, forms but one of the many sources of proof, to which the gospel of Christ appeals for its truth. This, indeed, is an observation which may be applied to every discourse, which is contained within this series; and I shall, on this account, dismiss it in a few words. It is of most apparent utility, to contemplate each of the branches of evidence, individually, and apart from others, in the first instance, and then to combine them together, that they may exert their full effect and influence upon our minds. By a process of this kind, moral evidence is so accumulated, that its power becomes concentrated, and it puts forth an energy, different in nature certainly from demonstrative proof, but little, if at all, inferior, in the impression which it produces upon the understanding, and the active faculties of the soul. To secure this effect, a considerable exertion of mind is indeed requisite: but it is for the attainment of an object, compared with which, all mortal interests sink into absolute insignificance. Let us not imagine that the search after truth can be conducted without toil, and advance successfully

without many a mental conflict. Nothing valuable and excellent is given to mortals, but on such conditions: and it is painful to be compelled to remark, that no small part of what passes for religious instruction, has a direct tendency to generate the belief that no such exertion is needed, for the acquirement of religious knowledge. Men professing christianity, and thus mistaking its character, are not, however, the only persons to whom the labour of thought is irksome, and the application of the mind too fatiguing to be tolerated: among the votaries of infidelity also, are to be found many, who are too indolent to employ labour in the investigation of truth, and who find it a far easier course to surrender their understandings to the bold assumptions of their teachers, and to transfer to their crude and superficial theories the faith which ought to be given only to what, by the weight of its evidence, shews itself to be worthy of the appellation of truth. Freethinking has its implicit believers, as well as christianity.

I shall here only remark further, in relation to the particular evidence which is the theme of this discourse, that it is of the most extensive use and application. Some of the parts of the evidence of christianity require, for their full developement, a considerable degree of research, and some portion of literary acquirement; while this lies upon the very surface, and offers itself to ready and universal notice. It is a species of proof, as level to the comprehension of the unlearned as to that of the most erudite. It requires but an attentive perusal of the sacred history, accompanied by a state of the heart, free and unshackled from the dominion of perverse and unholy propensities. Every man can judge of the moral and beneficial tendencies of pure christianity. Every man

is competent to perceive, that such a character as that which belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ, is absolutely incapable of deception and fraud; and to draw the inevitable conclusion, that if he were really invested with that character, "he came forth from God, and spake the words of God."

3. I beg your attention to this concluding remark, that fervent and persevering prayer furnishes a powerful aid to the attainment of religious truth, and is a sure pledge of the sincerity with which the pursuit of it is conducted. Speculative men have made many objections to the practice of prayer, and have endeavoured to shew it to be unphilosophical and superfluous. But objections of this kind are at variance with the natural sentiments of our hearts, and in direct opposition to the sense which we necessarily feel of our dependance upon a power and intelligence infinitely superior to our own. Whatever hold such objections may take of the heart in a condition of ease and security, they are effectually dislodged by the near approach of danger and the pressure of severe necessity. When human help fails, the feeble spirit of man will, in spite of its speculations, cling to that arm which alone has power to raise it from the abysses of misery and woe; and, while it feels itself to be sinking into them, will even involuntarily exclaim, "Lord, save me, I perish." As long as men believe in the existence of God, they must regard him as a Being who has power to relieve their necessities; and when those necessities press heavily upon them, they will not easily be deterred from the further belief, "that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

Are you then desirous of ascertaining whether the christian religion be divine? Are you earnestly seeking to determine, on sure grounds, whether the

character of Christ be from heaven, or of men? Let your endeavours to acquire satisfaction, be accompanied by a devout temper. It can scarcely be needful to point out to you what a freedom from prepossessions, which are hostile to your attainment of truth, upon this subject, will be communicated, by placing yourselves in the immediate presence of the God of all truth; conducting, under his eye, all your inquiries; and humbly imploring his aid, to preserve you from error and mistake in matters of such vital interest to your well-being and to his honour. The sense of his majesty will banish that levity of mind which is so unfavourable to the perception of truth;—the consciousness of his presence will prevent your yielding to the latent sentiments of pride, of worldly interest, and of insincerity, which often obstruct the entrance of truth into the soul;—the fact of your imploring assistance from his grace, will stimulate you to a faithful employment of all the means of acquiring truth, which are placed within your reach;—and the anticipation of his final and controlling judgment to be passed upon you, will bring all the faculties of your nature into active exercise;—your intellects will be invigorated, your perceptions rendered distinct and clear, the clouds of error will disperse, and you will behold the pure light of celestial truth, and rejoice in its radiance. A notion has been propagated, that a state of indifference is the condition of the mind most favourable for the search and attainment of truth. This may be correct, if applied to the topics of physical or mathematical pursuit; but nothing is more manifestly pernicious, or palpably false, if it be applied to moral and religious truth. Is a man to become indifferent to the stupendous consequences of religion, in order that his mind may be better fitted to inquire respecting

the nature and evidence of religion? Is a soul that is on its way to heaven, or to hell, to cultivate an insensibility to the surpassing magnitude of the condition to which it is destined, that it may thus be placed in more favourable circumstances, for determining to which path it shall direct its steps? Must we, before we commence our inquiries, divest the objects to which they relate of all that serves to give them interest and importance? One knows not whether the absurdity or the impiety of such a scheme predominates. It is akin to that device, for securing the mind from error, which, under the pretext of shunning to occupy it with prejudices in early life, would leave it to become the prey of ignorance, of sensuality, of conceit, and of all the vices to which our susceptible nature, in its most susceptible state, is liable. Every wise and good man, instead of thus dooming his children to become the victims of his folly, and of their own passions, will rather say, let me fill their minds as full of virtuous and lovely prejudices as it is possible for me; let me pre-occupy their hearts, if I may be so happy as to accomplish my purpose, with the love of God, of truth, and holiness, and mankind; trusting to the vigour of their matured understandings for that mental discipline which, at a more advanced period of their existence, shall be called into action, to enable them to detect the errors which I unconsciously may have instilled, and to confirm those truths which, as the happiest result of my endeavours, have been immoveably planted within their bosoms.

The principles which are in ordinary use among men, when their sentiments are not warped by sceptical sophisms, and when the dictates of common sense are unperverted by theoretical delusions, evidently direct to such a course, as being that which

reason and experience concur to justify. And can it be imagined, that when we are to inquire concerning the evidence on which christianity rests, we must aim at securing an impartial decision, by becoming indifferent to the consequences which flow from it? The very attempt involves an absurdity, since we can by no means separate the importance of religion from its truth; and were it free from absurdity, it would be useless for the end proposed, inasmuch as men do, and must exert their faculties for the attainment of truth, in proportion to their actual conviction of its magnitude and necessity. Let us then be influenced by no such groundless hypotheses; but, on the contrary, let us endeavour to acquire the deepest sentiments of the majesty and supreme importance of religious truth to our happiness, present and future, that we may thus pursue the knowledge of it, with an intensity of feeling and interest proportioned to its character. Especially let us endeavour to form just conceptions of the feebleness of our powers, of the errors to which our sinful and earthly prejudices render us liable, and of the infinite desirableness of becoming partakers of the divine illumination and guidance, which Christ has promised to all, who uprightly seek to become acquainted with the certainty of the truths which he taught: "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."

Are you then, that I may bring this appeal to its close, are you seeking to know, if Christ be the Master to whom you shall apply, and at whose feet you shall sit, for the attainment of heavenly truth? Let me implore you to bring to your help the aid of a devout and fervent dependence upon "the Father of lights, the giver of every good gift, and of every perfect gift."

Let the exercise of earnest supplication to God, accompany every effort which you make for satisfaction. This course will certainly be productive of the advantages which have been stated, while it will communicate to your hearts the most pregnant testimony of the sincerity which animates you; and will sustain you, under the influence of any painful apprehensions which you may yet experience for the result, by the cheering consciousness, that you have left nothing untried, which might direct your steps into the ways of truth and peace. I shall conclude, by expressing my entire persuasion, that if this course be pursued, you will at length adopt, as your own, the statement which the disciples of Jesus made, after their contemplation of his character, "we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

LECTURE VI.

ON THE EVIDENCE TO THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF CHRISTIANITY, DERIVED FROM THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

By JOHN PYE SMITH, D. D.

LECTURE VI.

ON THE EVIDENCE TO THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF CHRISTIANITY, DERIVED FROM THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

1 CORINTHIANS XV. 3, 4.

I delivered unto you, first of all, that which I also received; how that CHRIST *died for our sins, according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he rose again the third day, according to the scriptures.*

To every thinking man it must be obvious that, if we were required to specify that single argument, in the whole range of the evidences to revealed religion, upon which both believers and infidels might fairly agree to rest the strength and the determination of the cause, we should say, let it be this inquiry, Did Jesus rise from the dead? Though, considered as a miracle merely, this fact is not greater than any other miracle, for every such interposition must be regarded as the work of the Divine Being; yet its connexions and circumstances are those which give it a preeminence above all others, and make it decisive of the whole question. If it did indeed take place, it carried every point that a rational inquirer could wish: it was a fulfilment of prophecy, both that of the Old Testament, and that of Jesus himself: it was an attestation the most satisfactory to his divine

character and mission: it was setting the seal of heaven to all the doctrines that he taught and all the claims that he made: it crowned the glorious work of redemption for a guilty and lost world, with the brightest declaration of God's acceptance: it was a proof, which no time can impair, of the justification and safety of all who confide in him as their Saviour: it was the first step of ascent to his universal dominion as the Mediatorial Lord: and it was the promise, pledge, and earnest, to every one of his faithful servants, of triumphing over the fatal grasp of death, and rising up, in our whole nature of both soul and body, to an everlasting life of the purest happiness. To it the Lord Jesus referred, before his sufferings, as the test of his veracity and honour. To it his apostles appealed, as the principal fact of their testimony, the key-stone in the arch of that hope to which they were inviting the world. "If," said they, "Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain; yea, and we are found false witnesses of God;—ye are yet in your sins,—they who have fallen asleep in Christ are perished,—and we are, of all men, most miserable." Surely no person, whose mind is not dead to all the perceptions of moral beauty, can read these solemn and earnest declarations, and not be convinced that they are the utterance of an honest heart, the native expression of integrity, candour, and truth.

In the same serious and upright spirit, the apostle declares, in our text, that he delivered "first of all," as the fundamental and most necessary parts of his religious instructions, the facts, that JESUS the MESSIAH, the Founder and Head of the Christian faith, "died for our sins," as an atonement and a propitiation, "according to the scriptures," the ancient

writings of the Israelitish prophets; that "he was buried," entombed, in the mode which, in that age and country, was deemed the most respectful, and which consisted in being deposited in a large receptacle cut horizontally into a rock, and closed by an immense stone placed at its mouth; and that, after these and other unquestionable proofs of his death, and under circumstances completely precluding either mistake or deception, "he rose again" from the state of the dead, not as a separate spirit, not in the way of a vision or with the attributes supposed to belong to a spectre, but with his own material and tangible body, the same body which had been publicly tortured to death; "he rose" to all the functions of life, with a continuance of the same dispositions, purposes, and course of action, which he had carried on before his death; "he rose" never again to be brought within the domain of mortality, but to live for ever and ever in the enjoyment of the highest honour and happiness, and to be the bestower and preserver of everlasting happiness to all that obey him: and this also was "according to the scriptures;" David, Isaiah, and others of the Hebrew prophets had, many centuries before, foretold this great event.

Are these assertions true? Did Jesus really rise from the dead?

It shall be my sincere endeavour to examine this question with the same impartiality, cautiousness, and rigour that I would use if I had been but recently made acquainted with it, and had the conviction which I now have of its extreme importance.

The mode of conducting the inquiry which seems to me the most fair, and likely to lead to the most satisfactory conviction of the truth, on which side soever it may lie, is, *first*, Briefly to detail the state-

ments which are made to us by the earliest christian historians, who are indeed our only sources of information on this subject: *secondly*, To examine the competency of those historians to obtain an indubitable knowledge whether the statements in question were true or not: and *thirdly*, To ascertain what grounds we have for relying on their integrity, and on the certain truth of the testimony which they have left us.

I. Let us take a survey of the statements respecting this event, which have been transmitted to us by the original historians of the life and actions of Jesus Christ.

But we are stopped at the threshold by some, who say that they have examined the Evidence in favour of Christianity, and have published what they call their "Manifesto," in which they affirm, that their leader has "fully and unanswerably demonstrated that the Scriptures of the New Testament were not written by the persons whose names they bear, that they did not appear in the times to which they refer, that the persons of whom they treat never existed, and that the facts which they relate never happened."

The circumstances of the unhappy person from whom these assertions have proceeded, have not prevented their credulous reception by some, and ought not, therefore, to prevent our paying to them due attention.

Scarcely any disbeliever, in ancient or in modern times, who has not been of the most low and ignorant description, has pretended to doubt the existence of the principal persons to whom the early christian documents relate. Even Mr. Paine, notoriously deficient as he was in learning and information, could not so trample upon the credibility of history, as not to admit that Jesus, a native of Judæa, filled a very

conspicuous station in the history of mankind, at the time which the New Testament assigns. Nor is this with him a matter of reluctant or hesitating concession; but he expatiates, with seeming cordiality, upon the virtuous and dignified character of Jesus as a patriot and a philanthropist, a moralist and a reformer. With respect to the genuineness of the books of the New Testament, so far as is material to the historical argument, no man who understands the subject, whether he believes those books to contain a revelation from God or not, can deny that we have more abundant proof of their having proceeded from the persons to whom they are ascribed, than can be adduced to prove the genuineness of the undisputed writings of Livy, Cæsar, or Cicero. As to the question, whether the things related in the New Testament history actually took place, that is the very point in dispute between the two parties of Christians and Deists. No man can judge of it who will not take the pains of a serious investigation of the evidence on the whole case; and this is impartially stated in many publications, well known and easily accessible. But I feel it to be no violation of modesty to place myself in front of the arrogant and dogmatical Manifesto before alluded to, and to affirm that no person having the common understanding of men, however hostile he may be to the practical designs of Christianity, can honestly go through that investigation, and rise up from it without a rational conviction that Christianity is indeed a revelation of authority and benignity from the Supreme Being.

Possibly it may also be objected, that the details which I am about to bring forward are derived solely from the writings of the first Christians themselves, who are the parties concerned. I reply, that this is

necessary and unavoidable, for there are no other books in existence that apply to the point. But can any man of sense make this objection seriously? Does it invalidate the testimony of a witness, in a court of law, that he is sincerely convinced of what he attests? Does it diminish our confidence in the recitals of an original historian, to perceive internal evidence that he honestly believed that to be true which he records as true?

It is, however, in our power to bring the attestations of strangers and enemies, not indeed to the particular fact of the resurrection of Jesus, but to other facts which are so connected with the origin of Christianity as to furnish important assistance for our arriving at a satisfactory opinion upon the credibility of the first Christian books. The sagacious and penetrating historian Tacitus, and Pliny the proprætor of Bithynia, the correspondent and personal friend of the Emperor Trajan, lived in the age of the apostles; and though, swayed by the haughty prejudices of their country and their rank, they treated Christianity with contempt, and took no pains to become accurately acquainted with either its history or its doctrines, yet have they left testimonies* of which the following is the substance. That a person called Christ lived in Judæa, under the emperorship of Tiberius; that he suffered the punishment of death by the authority of Pontius Pilate, the Roman Procurator, or governor of that country; that he was the founder of a religious party, who were called Christians; that very early after his death, this party became exceedingly numerous, and extended into the city of Rome and other important and populous parts of the empire; that they were distinguished by peculiarities which brought upon them the astonishment and dislike of their neighbours, and persecution, acknowledged to be most unjust and cruel, from the ruling powers; that those peculiarities consisted in their inflexible renunciation of idolatry, in their holding religious meetings on a regular day, in their paying divine honours to Christ, in their practical opposition to every kind of wickedness, and in their being the zealous friends of personal virtue and social morality; that the public and their very persecutors themselves were perfectly convinced of their moral innocence; that great multitudes of them endured the most terrifying torments and horrid modes of death, rather than relinquish their attachment to Jesus Christ, or give up their assertion of the matters of fact which were the reasons of that attachment; and that the small number, who, from the dread of such sufferings, were induced to comply with idolatrous ceremonies, could not vindicate their own apostacy, by casting any reflection upon the integrity of the party which they had deserted, or by even insinuating a doubt with regard to the reality of the facts on which the religion was grounded.

* These are given at length, with a translation, in a small publication called "An Answer to a Printed Paper, intitled *Manifesto of the Christian Evidence Society:* published by the Society for Promoting Christian Instruction."

There is also another body of evidence of a kind similar to this.* We have remaining, more or less completely, some writings of skilful, learned, inveterate, and powerful adversaries to Christianity, who lived near enough to the times, and who possessed every motive to urge them, and every means to enable

* It may be proper to acknowledge that the substance of this and the next paragraph is inserted in the before-mentioned pamphlet, "The Answer to the *Manifesto*, &c."

them, had it been possible, to deny the genuineness of the Christian scriptures, or the existence of the persons concerning whom those scriptures treat. These were Celsus in the second century, Porphyry and Hierocles in the third, and the Emperor Julian in the fourth. These authors speak of Jesus and his apostles as persons who were as well known to have existed as any other men of a prior period; they refer, and often by name, to the writers of the Four Gospels, and to the other authors of the New Testament; they never contest the genuineness of those writings; they never assert, or so much as hint at, any other records, traditions, or documents of any kind, as capable of being pleaded in contradiction to the Christian books; they mention many of the facts in the history of our Lord, without venturing to dispute them; they even allow, in the plainest terms, not a few of his miracles, and their only way of endeavouring to escape the natural conclusion from them is by disparaging their magnitude, and by ascribing the performance of them to those magical arts, a belief in which formed a principal part of the heathen opinions.

To those who can allow themselves to be persuaded that there is any historical uncertainty, whether Jesus and his original disciples ever lived, I submit another obvious and undeniable fact. The Jews, as a separate community, marked with unequalled peculiarities, have existed before the face of all nations, from the time of their dispersion, not forty years after the affirmed crucifixion of Jesus, down to the present day: and they, with only individual exceptions, and those as yet very few, obstinately persist in rejecting Jesus as a teacher or a Saviour. In vain is evidence laid before them; in vain are they solicited to examine it. The pertinacity of unbelief perverts their understandings, as

well as hardens their hearts. Their Rabbinical traditions and legends, though puerile to a degree scarcely credible, they receive with a perfect surrender of even common sense; while to the sober and rational arguments on which Christianity is founded, they appear, in general, totally impervious. But do these inveterate opponents of Jesus and his religion venture to assert that HE never existed? It would be an immense advantage to their cause, if they could with reason say so: it would redeem them from the heaviest opprobrium, and it would place them in a new and honourable situation in the eyes of the world. Yet no such course as this have they ever taken. On the contrary, they unanimously maintain, because they know it impossible to resist the evidence of the fact, that Jesus did live at the time which we assign; they acknowledge that the terrible destruction of their nation took place soon afterwards; and they are perfectly aware that the followers of Jesus, from that time downwards, have attributed the unexampled calamities of the Jewish people to their having rejected him, as the Messiah predicted and described in their own sacred writings. And even more than this; an anonymous Jewish book,* written in the middle ages for the purpose of heaping the foulest calumny and infamy upon Jesus and his followers, *expressly admits* that he healed the sick, raised the dead, and wrought other works confessedly above the power of man: but it pretends to account for those miracles by saying that he effected them through the power of an incantation, in using the incommunicable name of the Deity, which, they say, he had surreptitiously obtained from the

* *Toldoth Jesu*; pp. 7, 8, 11, 18, 19, 22: ap. Wagenseilii Tela Ignea Satanæ; Altdorf, 1681.

temple at Jerusalem. It is deserving of particular observation that this book, full of disgusting blasphemies, further asserts that, after Jesus had been put to death and buried, his body was taken out of the sepulchre by Judas, who told the rest of his disciples that he had returned to life and was ascended to heaven; and that, following the directions of Simon Cephas, they succeeded in propagating a new religion under the name of their departed Master.

Here, then, we have a mass of evidence, derived from the most inveterate and malicious enemies of Christianity, far more than sufficient to destroy the preliminary objection.

I am now free to adduce the details of the facts, concerning the RESURRECTION of the LORD JESUS, as they are presented to us in the simple and artless narratives of the four historians.

After long watchfulness, extreme fatigue, mental agonies indescribable and producing a perspiration tinged with extruded blood, indicating such a shock to the constitution as would of itself have probably become a cause of death; being dragged by unfeeling soldiers, in chains or galling cords; his temples pierced to the quick, whence a mortal fainting was not unlikely to have ensued; the blows of hands inured to violence and perhaps armed with heavy gauntlets; being tied to a column and his naked body torn with a scourge of dreadful torture, having iron points and fragments of bone chained among the lashes; and then being compelled to bear the cross of death upon his lacerated and bleeding flesh;—after this train of previous suffering, the bare mention of which harrows up every feeling of humanity, and which could not but bring down the sufferer into the very grasp of death, JESUS was CRUCIFIED: a mode of capital punishment

which was a horrible refinement of cruelty, and in which the whole weight of the body was suspended on nails driven through the hands; to the production of excruciating pain, but not of death till long and lingering agony had subdued the powers of life. This agony, with the many aggravating circumstances peculiar to his case, the blessed Jesus endured for six hours. He then expired.—Probably about three hours after, the soldiers, men accustomed to the signs of death, inspected and were satisfied that dissolution had taken place: but one of them, whether in barbarous insult, or from a feeling of compassion, to extinguish any possibly remaining spark of life, or to put the question of death out of all doubt, drove his spear into the side of the corpse; and out of it blood and water immediately flowed, a physical demonstration that death had for some time taken place.

In the evening, the body was taken down, rolled up in linen with embalming substances, and laid in a tomb which had been prepared in a retired garden, close to the place of crucifixion, by a man of rank and opulence, intending it for himself. This tomb consisted of a vault dug horizontally in the solid rock, much more secure than a common burying place; and its entrance was closed with a stone of very large size. It is also probable, according to the custom of Jewish antiquity, that an erection was built in front of the cavity, forming a small vestibule.*

This memorable day was the sixth day of the week, and the thirteenth of the Hebrew month Nisan; answering for that year, according to our notation of time, to Friday the third day of April.

On the following morning, the leading men in the

* See Dr. Townson's Works, Vol. II. p. 78—81.

Jewish ecclesiastical government, who had been the authors of the death of Jesus, requested of the Roman governor that the tomb might be guarded by a band of soldiers, till the day after the sabbath, professing apprehensions lest his disciples should privately take away the body: but they had, not improbably, another object, namely, to make sure of the body for a public and insulting exposure as soon as might be convenient to themselves. Pilate allowed them to take for this service a part of the guard which had already been placed at their disposal. The usual number for the custody of a single person was four, to be relieved every three hours: and most probably this rule would be acted upon in the present instance. They also adopted the precaution of sealing the stone which shut up the mouth of the vault, probably by affixing the impressed wax to the two ends of a ribbon drawn across it. Thus the slightest attempt to shake the stone would be detected. In this state, matters remained through the whole of Saturday, the Jewish sabbath.

On the following morning, at the earliest dawn, three pious women, Mary the wife of Alphæus and aunt of Jesus, Mary of Magdala, and Salome the wife of Zebedee, set out to go to the sepulchre, intending to anoint the corpse with fragrant preparations, according to the custom of their country and their respectable station in society. They had probably obtained permission from the proprietor, some of whose servants they might expect to find in the garden, and to these they would naturally apply to obtain the removing of the stone. It can scarcely be doubted that they and the other disciples of Jesus had spent the whole of the preceding day in mournful privacy, in their respective places of abode; and therefore they

were all ignorant of the appointment of a guard and the sealing of the stone.

But, before they arrived at the garden, a wondrous scene had taken place. An earthquake shook the ground. A heavenly being appeared in awful majesty. The soldiers trembled and fled. The angel, who had been commissioned thus to wait upon his Lord, in a moment removed the stone: "and the HOLY ONE OF GOD AROSE, in a manner which no one of the evangelists offers to describe."*

When the women were so near that they could look into the vestibule, they saw the entrance of the tomb open, and were convinced that the stone had been removed. Surprised and alarmed, Mary of Magdala did not stay to learn any thing further, but hastened away with a view to give the information to any of the friends of Jesus whom she could find.

The other two entered the vestibule. There they saw the heavenly messenger, appearing as a youth clothed in a white robe, sitting upon the stone on the right side of the opening to the tomb. He spake to them and said, "Fear ye not: I know that ye seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay; and go quickly, and tell his disciples, and Peter in particular, that he is risen from the dead: and behold, he is going before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you. Behold, I have told you."

They departed in haste and agitation, under a conflict of feelings of hope and terror: and so great was their consternation, that for some time they could not speak.

* Thus expressed, in solemn and beautiful simplicity, by Dr. Townson.

In the mean time, Mary of Magdala found Peter and John, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him." Immediately these two apostles set out; and, in their solicitude and eagerness, they ran to the sepulchre. John arrived first. He entered the vestibule, stooped down, and examined the inside of the tomb or vault, and saw plainly that no corpse was there: he also saw the linen grave-clothes, in which the body had been swathed, lying in the tomb. Peter then came; and, not satisfied with looking into the vault, he entered, and carefully explored it. But he found nothing more than his companion had seen: only he made the remarkable observation, that the grave-clothes were not thrown loosely about, but disposed in an orderly manner, and the napkin, which had been rolled round the head of the corpse, neatly folded up, and laid by itself; thus indicating the calm and dignified manner in which the Lord Jesus had quitted the abodes of death. John followed into the tomb, and had his persuasion confirmed that the body was not there; though as yet neither of these apostles had attained to the understanding of a real resurrection to life, as predicted in the scriptures concerning the Messiah. They then retired to their own dwellings, deeply meditating on these wondrous scenes.

Mary of Magdala had walked after Peter and John, when they, upon her first information, ran to the sepulchre. Whether she found them there, or met them on their return, does not appear: but they could not remove her anxiety. She therefore stood by the entrance of the vestibule, alone and weeping. In a little time, she looked in, and saw two heavenly messengers, in splendid clothing, sitting one at the

head and the other at the foot of the tomb. They said to her, "Woman, why weepest thou?" She replied, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." Struck with awe, she turned, in order to retire; or perhaps she heard the tread of some person behind her. Then she saw standing in the garden ONE whom she knew not. Her distress and agitation, her eyes suffused with tears, and his altered appearance, prevented her from perceiving that *this was* JESUS. He said to her, "Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?" Still she knew him not. Supposing that he was the overseer of the grounds, she declined to look attentively at him, but said, "Sir, if thou hast carried him away, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him up." She probably feared that the corpse had been carried off by enemies, to be exposed and insulted; and was anxious to recover it for the decencies of interment. The unknown person said to her, "Mary!" The hearing of her own name, the kind voice, the accustomed tone,—aroused her attention. She looked, and knew her Lord. She exclaimed "My Teacher!" and probably fell at his feet, to embrace them and adore him.* Jesus said to her, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." She obeyed him, and hastened to bear the glad tidings to the other disciples.

On her way, it appears that she met with her two

* This is rendered probable by the circumstance of the same action having been performed by the other two women, in the same circumstances, and immediately after.

friends, from whom she had been separated at their early visit to the sepulchre; and who were now probably returning thither. She could not fail to communicate to them her joyful intelligence: and they joined her in carrying it to the disciples. But a greater happiness and honour awaited them. On their way, Jesus presented himself before them, and said, "Hail ye!" And they came forwards, embraced his feet, and worshipped him. He further said, "Fear not: go, tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there they shall see me."

We must now go back to the commencement of another train of circumstances. Besides the three women who have been mentioned, there were other pious females, believers and friends of the Lord Jesus, and who had accompanied him out of Galilee. A principal person among these was Joanna, the wife of Chuza, an officer in the household of Herod Agrippa. They had, on the Friday evening, attended at the sepulchre when the corpse was deposited there; and, with all the interest of affection, had watched the circumstances of the entombment. On their return, that same evening, they also prepared the suitable perfumes for embalming the body. They rested through the sabbath, according to law and custom. On the morning of the third day, they went to the sepulchre, but at a later hour than the other women. They, of course, found the stone removed, but no one of whom they might ask the cause. Some of them, therefore, entered into the tomb to explore it; and were satisfied that the body of Jesus was not there. In the midst of their perplexity, the angels who had been seen by the two other women appeared, standing close to them. The sudden vision filled them with terror. The celestial beings said, "Why seek ye

Him that is living, among the dead? He is not here, but he is risen. Remember how he spake to you, while he was in Galilee, saying, that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of wicked men and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." They, thus instructed and comforted, then repaired to their fellow-disciples, and united their testimony to that of the other women. But this testimony appeared incredible to their friends; who were so far from being ready instruments for a tale of delusion or imposture, that they erred on the side of pertinacious scepticism.

In the course of that day, but of the exact time and circumstances we are not informed, the Lord Jesus appeared to Peter.

The afternoon of the day brought another and striking confirmation of the fact of his resurrection. Two disciples, but who seem not to have been of the eleven apostles, had occasion to go to Emmaus, a village about eight miles from Jerusalem. On their way, they talked together out of the fulness of their troubled minds. Jesus joined them, in perfect strength and activity; a demonstration that he had not been taken down from the cross in a swoon, and recovered by cordials and surgical skill, as some have presumed to say. Apart from all other evidence on the case, it would, on that supposition, have been physically impossible for him to have walked such a distance, or even at all, till many weeks had elapsed. These two disciples were prevented, no doubt by a peculiar divine influence, from recognizing him; though they told him their doubts and sorrows, and though he largely discoursed with them on the prophecies concerning the Messiah, his sufferings, and his glory. Having arrived at Emmaus, he sat down with them to take

food: he made himself known to them, and instantly he disappeared.

They could not suppress their joy, but immediately returned to Jerusalem, to impart it to their brethren. These they found assembled, privately from fear of the Jews, and filled with mingled feelings of terror and of joy, upon the tidings, that "the Lord was risen indeed, and had appeared unto Simon Peter." The two related what had occurred to themselves: and, while they were speaking, Jesus himself stood among them, dissipated their apprehensions, conversed with them, partook of their food, and made to them the most gracious communications of his wisdom and authority.

Thus, on the very day of the Resurrection, the Lord Jesus shewed himself five distinct times; in the last instance to a considerable number of his friends and followers, whom he invited to touch and handle him, that they might be satisfied of his corporal reality. When this was related to Thomas, who had been absent, he and some others persisted in refusing credit to the reporters; and he declared that nothing short of the strongest evidence of sight and touch could satisfy him. Such evidence his Lord condescended to give him, on the first day of the following week, in the presence of the other disciples. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst of them, and said, "Peace be unto you!" Then saith he to Thomas, demonstrating a perfect knowledge both of his unreasonable disbelief and of his unseemly expressions, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not disbelieving but believing." Thomas answered and said unto him, "My LORD and my GOD!"

Other especial interviews of Christ and his disciples are recorded: one, pursuant to his appointment before his death, on a mountain in Galilee; one, on the shore of the lake in that country; another, to above five hundred brethren at once, perhaps at the time when he gave his great commission to "go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature:" and it is probable that there were others, which are not specified. In fine; he shewed himself alive to his chosen witnesses, after his sufferings, by many infallible proofs, being seen by them through the period of forty days, speaking to them the things concerning the kingdom of God, and graciously assuring them, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." When those days were expired, he led a company of his faithful servants from Jerusalem to Bethany: he lifted up his hands and solemnly blessed them; and while he was blessing them, he was parted from them, a cloud received him out of their sight, and he was borne away in glory to the heavens.

These are the facts of our case. They have been thus brought into a connected view,* on account of their peculiar interest in themselves, and as they furnish a large part of the grounds on which our inquiry must proceed. Upon them I offer the following observations.

1. As these statements lie scattered in the narratives of the Four Evangelists, they wear, in various respects, the appearance of disagreement, and they are not brought into a probable harmony without minute investigation and laborious comparison. This is a process, in the inquiry after truth, analogous to

* This arrangement has been made by an endeavour at a diligent comparison of the statements of the Four Evangelists, assisted by the valuable investigations of Mr. West and Dr. Townson.

that of cross-examination in courts of law. When, in the depositions of several witnesses, referring to a multitude of small particulars, contradiction appears on a superficial survey, but that contradiction vanishes, and the different accounts are found to agree, when brought under a penetrating and rigorous review; it is universally looked upon as one of the strongest evidences of truth in testimony and integrity in character. This remark applies to the collection of statements which we have gone through. In the broad and grand features of the transaction, the Evangelists agree; but each has his own way of telling his declaration; each appears to describe the process of information received, by which his own mind was at the time satisfied; each stood in a different position with regard to the course of developements; each had, therefore, a variety of smaller circumstances to mention, which did not fall in the way of the others; these require attentive considering and comparing; and, after such a process, we discover that they really and most admirably harmonize, upon the philosophical principles of human nature, the association of ideas, and the varieties of mind and character.

2. The Resurrection of Christ is proposed to our belief avowedly as a *Miracle*, an interposition of God out of the natural course of events. To form a correct judgment concerning it, no person is qualified who has not taken the pains of understanding the general argument, on behalf of Divine Revelation, from Miracles. The present forms one case in that general argument. It is, therefore, desirable that the reader of the present discourse should be familiar with the principles established by my respected brother, the Rev. James Stratten, in his Sermon on the Nature,

Certainty, and Design of Miracles; the fourth in this volume.

3. The statements to which we have attended imply a belief in the existence and operations of orders of intelligent creatures superior to man. The affirmation of the scriptures is clear and positive upon this subject. But to any one who, unhappily for himself, does not admit their authority, I would only put the question, Does not an enlarged philosophy suggest, that, as we see a regular gradation of beings beneath us, so there may be above us? Is it not rendered, in the highest degree, probable, by the demonstrated facts of the magnitude, extent, and diversity of the visible universe? Are there not phænomena of mind, cognizable by every man's own reflection, which supply intimations and reasonable presumptions of the position?

II. We now proceed to the second part of our intention, an inquiry into the COMPETENCY of the witnesses and relators, to know, with certainty for themselves, whether the narrative which we have heard was TRUE, or not.

i. It cannot admit of a rational doubt that DEATH had absolutely taken place in the mortal frame of Jesus Christ. By any one who reflects upon the circumstances preceding, attending, and following his crucifixion, it appears to me impossible that a question on this head could be sincerely entertained for a moment. Besides the accumulated mass of other proofs, the flowing of a watery fluid along with the blood, from the pierced side, was a demonstration of two things; first, that the spear was thrust into a vital part, which must of itself have been fatal; and, secondly, that death had fully taken place already. And if, in despite of the clearest evidence, it were to

be imagined that a feeble spark of life remained, can any man doubt that it would not be completely extinguished by the body's being rolled up in a cloth, the orifices of breathing being thus closed up, and then being left in the damp and cold cavity of a rock?

ii. The belief, on the part of the original witnesses, that Jesus had returned to life, was not a matter of fancy, opinion, or prepossession. The latter principle had not the slightest hold on their minds. On the contrary, it is evident that they had all failed to understand the predictions which their Master had uttered, at different times, before his death. Their remarkable obtuseness on this head appears to have been ordained by Providence, as a precluding of any possible suspicion of collusion when the great event should take place. Their opinion lay all on the opposite side. Hope they had none: and their highest ambition (greatly honourable to their feelings and their character), was to indulge unavailing grief, and to treat the dead body with costly tokens of respect. As for the workings of fancy and enthusiastic imagination, it is clear that nothing was farther from their temper or turn of mind. But, had it been otherwise, the question was not one to which imagination could apply. It was a question of the plainest fact. It required only the exercise of *sight* and *hearing* and *touch*. It appealed to the common organs and senses of mankind: and it left no room for mistake.

iii. The *number* of the witnesses was a perfect guarantee against either mistake or deception. It might have been said, however unjustly, that one or two persons, especially delicate and timid females, might be deceived even in a matter subjected to their senses. But there is no room left, in this case, for such a surmise. The persons who heard and saw,

touched and conversed with Jesus, after his resurrection, were *numerous;* and they were persons of *different* ages, bodily and mental temperaments, habits, and associations: one woman, three women, another party of women whose number is unknown, one man, two men, ten men, eleven men, five hundred persons at once. It is a manifest impossibility that so many and so different persons should have been imposed upon, either by their own imaginations or by the artifice of others, in a matter not of opinion or fancy, but of *sense*.

iv. The circumstances of *time* and *place* are irreconcilable with any mode of delusion. The appearances of Jesus were not made under the cover of darkness, in solitary and gloomy places, the common scenes of superstitious fable; but in open day, under the blaze of the sun, in cheerful walks, on the public paths, and at the season of the year when Jerusalem and its suburbs exhibited the appearance of a crowded fair. Those appearances were many times repeated; five or six times on the very first day, and we know not how frequently afterwards. Thus every opportunity was afforded to recover from consternation, to prepare for the next interview, and to guard against any overpowering feelings. It is another most important circumstance, that these opportunities were *continued* through the long period of forty days; thus furnishing time, means, and motives for every kind of examination, and every repetition of scrutiny that could be desired. And it has been seen, by the example of Thomas, that the disciples knew how to avail themselves of these opportunities.

These and similar considerations might be drawn out to greater length, illustrated more fully, and urged more forcibly: but this brief representation of

them is sufficient to shew that the persons who first declared the Resurrection of Christ, and upon whose testimony others believed it, could not have been imposed upon; could not but know the real state of the case, whether or not Jesus, whom they and many thousands had seen publicly put to death, had actually returned to life.

If, then, their declaration was not true, they were *not* misguided fanatics, but *wilful deceivers.* This supposition, therefore, we must examine.

III. What reason have we to rely upon the INTEGRITY of the witnesses to the Resurrection of Jesus, and the CERTAIN TRUTH of their testimony.

i. Let it be considered how difficult it is for any system of imposture to be carried on, for any length of time, without detection: we might even say, impossible. All history and experience prove this. If a scheme of deception be invented and carried into effect by but a single person, detection, sooner or later, overtakes him. The object is always some selfish end, some private advantage, the escape from some evil, or the acquisition of some enjoyment; property or honour, ease or pleasure. The person is always under restraint; he has a part to act, he has a perpetual watch to maintain, he has a force to keep constantly pressing upon his nature. It is morally certain that he will betray himself. Unguarded moments will occur. He becomes entangled in his own web. No art, no vigilance, no talent, in mortal power, can preserve him.

But how much are the chances of detection multiplied, if the secret be in the possession of several persons! Conspiracies of unprincipled men have too often occurred; and, for a short time, they have been successful. But the separation of the agents,

distinct examinations, disagreement among themselves, new ideas of personal interest, and the gnawings of conscious guilt, inevitably bring the plan to an explosion.

Let any thinking person apply these obvious remarks to the case before us. If those who first alleged the Resurrection of Jesus, and affirmed that they had seen, touched, and conversed with him, through the period of six weeks, in the capacity of a man who had returned to life from the state of the dead, were deceivers; let it be considered what was the kind and extent of their conspiracy to deceive. Not two or three, nor twenty or thirty, but some hundreds of persons must have been engaged in it: persons of both sexes, of different ages and stations, most of them, beyond a doubt, of spotless fame and character. In the families of many of these there must have been children, capable of understanding the subject, whose natural curiosity would have led them to watch any mysterious proceeding which they saw carried on, and whose efforts would have certainly penetrated into it. Further: the remorseless persecution which shortly raged against those who persisted in affirming what they said they had known by the evidence of their senses, terrified some who had embraced their doctrine into an abjuration of the faith: and others were hypocrites from the beginning, and they became apostates when their selfish interests were to be served by so doing. Now, could not an individual be found, out of either of these classes, who would reveal the collusion? Did no motives of feeling or interest, hope or fear, honour or conscience, operate upon any, to induce the frank exposure of a scheme so nefarious? Were there no relenting men, no timid women, no children exulting

in having found out the secret, and burning to disclose it? Did the most savage tortures bring none to confess? Did no deserters from the cause justify themselves by laying the plot open?—No: never; we challenge the world to produce an instance.

ii. The proceedings of the original enemies to the Christian cause, carried with them a strong confirmation of the truth of the testimony on which that cause rests.

The Jewish authorities, the chiefs of their ecclesiastical sects, and the men who exercised absolute power, were in a condition to be thoroughly acquainted with the entire series of these transactions. They lay under the most urgent motives, from both character and interest, to detect the imposture, if there had been one; and the effectual means of detection were at their command. They had even understood our Lord's predictions of a resurrection more readily than his own friends: for, on the morning after his death, they applied to the Roman governor, saying, "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was alive, after three days I shall rise again;" and therefore they requested a guard to be set over the sepulchre. A guard, be it observed, not of Jews, who might have been suspected of some predilection in favour of Jesus, and who might have objected to the being thus employed on their sabbath; but of Roman soldiers, bold and resolute men, heathens, and harrassed by no scruples. Now, how did these men in power act when the guard fled to them in terror, and told them what had taken place? If they had believed that the military had been unfaithful, or had all fallen asleep (a thing morally impossible under their discipline and habits), would they not have felt the utmost indignation? Would they not have laid the crime

before the governor, and procured the punishment of the men who had so cruelly disappointed them? Would they not have produced the dead body, and so have put the matter publicly and for ever out of all question?—Certainly, they would have so acted, had they been honest men. But they took the course which fraud and fear alone could have dictated. They soothed and bribed the soldiers, and put into their mouths a most silly and palpable untruth. Yet this poor subterfuge was really the best that could be devised. Matthew who relates it (and who had probably been informed of it many years after, by some of the parties themselves,*) adds that this was the representation commonly circulated among the Jews down to that time. Let me remind you that this weak and impossible story is found in the Jewish book to which I have before referred. It is also found in a Greek work of the second century, of whose genuineness no doubt can be entertained, and which informs us that the Jews propagated every where the statement, that

* Irenæus, who lived within sixty years of the time, says that "Matthew published his writing of the Gospel among the Hebrews, in their own language; at the time when Peter and Paul were making known the glad tidings and founding the church at Rome." This was about A. D. 64, five years after the history of "The Acts of the Apostles" ceases. It seems highly probable that, when the guards brought their report to such of the chief priests as were accessible, only a very small number were assembled, or could be so hastily got together. They would be deeply anxious to keep their own counsel. Hence, it is a reasonable inference that none of the apostles, or any other Christians, were informed of this transaction, till very long after; and that, consequently, no allusion to it occurs in the subsequent books of the New Testament. Matthew probably learned it, at that distance of time, from some of the soldiers, or even of the priests themselves who had been the authors of the contrivance, but who were now converted to the Christian religion.

"a godless and lawless sect had been raised up by one Jesus, a Galilæan impostor; whom," they go on to say, "we crucified, but his disciples stole him by night, out of the sepulchre in which he had been laid when unnailed from the cross; and they deceive men, by giving out that he had risen from the dead, and had ascended to heaven."* Now, observe in what manner these persons acted when, a few weeks afterwards, the apostles were brought before them and charged with publishing the Resurrection of Jesus. Peter undauntedly accused his judges of the murder of Jesus, and asserted that God had raised him up: "Of these things," said he, "we are witnesses:" and, when most eagerly enjoined by them to suppress the matter, he, in the name of his associates, declared that they would not and could not suppress it. Why did these men suffer themselves to be thus dared and provoked, in the face of their own tribunal? They, who, not long before, had risen in a rage when it was but modestly suggested that no man ought to be condemned unheard;† they who had shewn such cold-blooded iniquity and savage cruelty in bringing Jesus to death;—why do they shrink at the rebuke of a poor prisoner, and take refuge in the evasive and temporizing policy of Gamaliel?—Their conduct is inexplicable on all the principles of human action, except one, *the consciousness of guilt.* This it was that made them cowards. They knew that they had bribed the guards. They felt the mine which they had dug under their own feet. They trembled with the dread of disclosure. Hence their altered mien, their pusillanimous counsels, and their dismissing their prisoners

* Justini Mart. Dialog. cum Tryphone; ed. Jebb, p. 317.
† See John vii. 47—52; and ix. 27—34.

with harmless commands and vague vapours of threatening. Their whole behaviour is that of men conscious of wrong, and afraid to stir lest they should undo themselves.

These facts shew the unreasonableness of the objection, Why did not Jesus shew himself to his enemies and to the world at large, as openly after his resurrection as he had done before it? Apart from all considerations of the dignity and propriety which were due to his state of incipient glorification, it is manifest that injury rather than benefit would have accrued to the evidence of the case, from such an exposure. If the Jewish rulers had persisted in their unbelief, or rather affectation of unbelief, which their whole conduct renders the more probable supposition, the partizans of infidelity would have laid hold of the circumstance as a plea against the sufficiency of the proofs. If, on the other hand, they had declared themselves convinced, it would have been said, with more plausibility than commonly belongs to infidel arguments, that a coalition had been effected between Jesus and his former opponents; and that the whole series of transactions, his trial and crucifixion, his apparent death, the guard set over his tomb, and the results which followed, had been managed collusively by the men who had all the power which such an attempt required. A suspicion might thus have been excited which could not have been wiped away: and we should have been precluded from that guarantee, against the possibility of a deep-laid plan to deceive, which we now derive from the determined hostility of the persons who occupied the seats of authority, and who had both every motive and every means to detect a fraudulent scheme if it had existed.

iv. Consider the way which the apostles took, to obtain credit to their testimony that Jesus had actually risen from the dead.

They used not the enticing words of gaudy and artificial eloquence, or subtle and sophistical pleading. They had no earthly honours or possessions to give. They did not make proselytes at the sword's point. They had no favour from the laws, nor countenance from the great, nor interest with the people. Every human prepossession, every earthly motive, was against them. They took only one course, the simple, brief, unadorned manifestation of the truth: they said, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." They told their plain testimony, and they left it to stand or fall by its own worth. They did, indeed, adopt one method of gaining credit to their word: but that was a method which, above all others, impostors would not have ventured upon. They declared that He whose resurrection from death they preached, had commissioned and authorized *them* also to work miracles, not by any power or goodness of their own, but *in* HIS *name*. Upon this issue they put their claims to credit: and the issue was decisive. These credentials were given in the towns and cities of Judæa and through the Roman Empire generally, in the most public manner, where every motive of reason, prejudice and interest was engaged to detect the least fraudulent attempt, and where, in fact, imposition was impossible.

If, then, success followed such an appeal, the conclusion is unavoidable, that the conditions were performed, that the attestation of the Deity was given, and that consequently the fact was real and the doctrine true. But we know that great and triumphant

success did follow the ministry of the apostles. Many thousands of both Jews and heathens did, upon this evidence, renounce their prejudices, their bigotry, their national usages, their fascinating idolatries, their captivating voluptuousness; embraced the testimony of the apostles, the doctrine of Jesus; made every earthly sacrifice rather than abandon that religion; lived in piety, temperance, and every virtue; and yielded themselves to the most excruciating forms of death for the truth's sake.

These results form an epoch in the history of the human race, more preeminent and observable than any other. From it, the affairs of the world have derived a new character and have flowed in a new channel. The events of the Roman Empire from the reign of Nero to its subversion, the rise and ascendancy of the Mahometan imposture, and the general current of things among all the considerable nations of the world for the last eighteen hundred years, have an inseparable connexion with the origin and acceptance of the Christian religion at the time which we allege: and this origin and acceptance are impossible to be accounted for, on any rational principles, unless we receive the grand fact which they imply, the RESURRECTION OF JESUS from the state of the dead.

v. Attention is due to the *intent and purpose* for which the apostles bore their testimony to the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

What end had they in view? Their history and their writings disclose it. It was to spread a religion which prohibits every sin, which enjoins every virtue and every branch of holiness as essential to salvation, which allows no pious frauds, which sanctions no compromising with duty, which permits no compensation for moral offences by pecuniary penalties or ceremonial

observances, which has one law for the loftiest monarch and the poorest slave, which brings a holy salvation to all who will sincerely accept of it, which reveals the inflexible wrath of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, and which assures us that every one shall give account of himself to God. This, and only this, was their object: an object marked by every character of wisdom, benevolence, and piety. Any man who knows what goodness is, and who is not entirely dead to the perception of its beauty, I would beg to make himself acquainted with the morality of the New Testament, and to draw his knowledge from the fountain-head. I would then leave him to answer the question, Has this system been the invention of liars and impostors?

These are the reasons which, in our most serious judgment, carry an invincible and everlasting proof that the witnesses to the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ deserve the *entire reliance of all mankind* upon the integrity of their characters and the TRUTH of their testimony.

LECTURE VII.

THE EVIDENCE OF REVELATION DERIVED FROM THE SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL.

By ANDREW REED.

LECTURE VII.

THE EVIDENCE OF REVELATION DERIVED FROM THE SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL.

ACTS v. 34---40.

Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; and said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will COME TO NOUGHT: *but if it be of God,* YE CANNOT OVERTHROW IT; *lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.*

PALESTINE was formerly occupied by a people distinguished from all other nations by their political and religious economy. The peculiarities both of their civil and ecclesiastical polity were professedly derived from a revelation made to them immediately from

heaven. The most remarkable and predominant feature of this revelation was, that it testified of "One who was to come;" and who, when he should arrive, would subdue all things to Himself. To the advent of this mysterious personage all their institutions were made subordinate. The genealogy of the people, their separation from surrounding nations, the types and ceremonies of their worship, and even the living examples of their prophets, priests, sovereigns, and heroes, had reference to Him; while the voice of this professed revelation was continued age after age to declare the glory and triumph of His appearance. In the infancy of the world, it was asserted by a mystical promise, that He should bruise the head of his enemies; and, as the chapter of prophecy advanced to its completion, his names, his character, and his birth-place; his mission, his work, and the blessings resulting from it, were either set down with the exactness of history, or enshrined in the splendours of poetry. He was to annihilate the distinction existing between the Jew and the Gentile; and to extend the privileges of the Israelite to the nations of the world. He was to be "a light to lighten the Gentiles; and the Saviour of his people Israel." He was to become "the desire of all nations," and "in Him all nations were to be blessed." His children were to come from the north and the south; Ethiopia, and Seba, and the islands of the Western Sea were to stretch forth their hands to Him; and of his dominion there was to be no end, either in extent or in duration.

About that period, when an expectation existed, that these important and singular prophecies were to begin to have their accomplishment, there appeared in Judea one Jesus of Nazareth, who claimed to be

received as the promised Messiah. He professed to be divinely commissioned to reveal the will of heaven; to effect the work of human redemption; and to glorify the name of God, by casting down the powers of darkness, and by founding a kingdom which was to be "not of this world." To crush at once himself and his sect, a conspiracy was formed by the Jewish people to take away his life. He was betrayed, and seized, and arraigned, and condemned, and crucified.

The expected effect, however, did not follow on the perpetration of this deed. On the contrary, the few disciples of their slain Lord were soon found preaching in his name, with amazing promptitude and boldness, and utterly fearless of all consequences to themselves. They testified, that though their Divine Teacher had been crucified by the hands of wicked men, yet it was according to the will of God, and the record of ancient scripture, that he should die for the sins of the people. They insisted, that as he really died and was buried, so he really rose from the dead; and that they, and five hundred other persons, were eye-witnesses of the fact. And they called on all who heard them to repent of the sin of rejecting and crucifying him; to believe on him as the alone Saviour; while, in his name, as Lord and God, they denounced the severest penal consequences on those who should remain in unbelief and disobedience.

This singular testimony, although made to those who were most qualified to judge of its truth, or to expose its absurdity, was, in the highest degree, effectual. At Jerusalem, three thousand persons, that is, nearly as many as heard it, were constrained to embrace it; and this amount was quickly increased to five thousand, who were associated together as

a christian church. From Jerusalem, the christian doctrine spreads throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. Saul of Tarsus then carries it from the Jewish land to the heathen world with equal success. The gospel is preached at Antioch, at Derbe, at Iconium; at Macedonia, at Corinth, and at Ephesus; at Alexandria, at Athens, and at Rome. All this occurs within thirty years of the alleged ascension of Christ; and the result of these extended ministrations is given in such incidental expressions as the following:—"that the disciples *multiplied greatly;*—that a *great number* believed, and turned to the Lord;—that a *great multitude* both of Jews and Greeks believed;—that the churches increased in number daily;—and that the word of the Lord *grew mightily* and *prevailed.*"

Still, as the years rolled by, the gospel continued to penetrate into yet remoter regions. It established itself not only in Asia, Greece, and Italy; but also in Spain, in France, in Germany, and in Britain. It succeeded equally with the civilized and the barbarous, the bond and the free; and prevailed over districts and realms, inaccessible to the laws and legions of Rome. It won its way into the court, the senate, the forum, and the temple; and men, the most opposite in rank, in temper, and in opinion, were alike subjected to its power. At length, Constantine made the christian doctrine "a part and parcel" of Roman law; and the imperial eagles, which had fought with the world, and fought only to conquer, were now seen cowering before the greater and bloodless victories of the Cross!

Thus far we are permitted to advance *without controversy;* and it would be unwise to overlay this portion of the subject with lengthened and needless

proof. That, during the first two centuries, the promulgation of Christianity was attended by general and most surprising success, if it is asserted by the christian apologist, is freely admitted by his adversary; and, for once, the names of Origen, Tertullian, and Justin Martyr, may be allied with those of Tacitus, Pliny, and Gibbon, in bearing testimony to the same truth. The fact, therefore, of the very general propagation of the gospel at this early period, is to be considered as put beyond the limits of debate by the consentaneous voice of history.

Now, however, a question arises, which is open to our fullest discussion, and on which we must bestow an examination as enlarged as the limits of this exercise will allow. It is this: admitting that the gospel was remarkably successful in the first two centuries of the Christian æra, *how far are we authorized in considering this success as a certain evidence of its divinity?*

It would be manifestly impossible rightly to enter on such an inquiry, without a strong sense of its importance and seriousness; yet no such sentiment must be so indulged as to overawe the mind, and restrain it from the freest investigation. At present, as on former occasions, we are sitting in judgment on the claims of a book of high and extraordinary pretensions; and properly to pursue this inquiry, we must desire not to reach a *favourable,* but a *right* conclusion. A partial and biassed inquiry, like a mock trial, would make even the best cause questionable; and a revelation, professing to come from God, could not be more effectually dishonoured, than by a dexterous attempt to *manage* or to *compromise* the examination of its credentials.

The greater caution is evidently necessary on the present subject, from this particular circumstance—that the cause we are about to try is avowedly a successful and prosperous one. All who are observant of human life, know how much men are disposed to confound the merits of a cause with its issue. If it succeed, then it is pronounced to be good, and the projectors are prudent and skilful men; if it fail, it is therefore considered unworthy, and those who would have promoted it are henceforth no more than schemists and visionaries. So extensively do such accidental circumstances operate to obscure the real force of evidence, that in ordinary life it is truly said, "When thou doest well to thyself men will praise thee;" and, from their exerting a like influence over more public events, it is proverbial to remark, "that treason and heresy are never successful;" because, if successful, their very name and character are *changed* in the judgment of mankind.

It becomes us, therefore, to approach our subject in the exercise of a salutary jealousy over ourselves; and with a firm determination, that no illusion arising from the alleged triumphs and benefits of christianity shall lead us astray from the pure and steady lights of evidence. Let our inquiry be humble and devout; but let it also be calm, rigid, and uncompromising. Let nothing satisfy us, but what *ought* to satisfy the most sceptical; and that we may not remain wilful unbelievers in the presence of the most convincing evidence, let our minds be raised to that Great Eternal Spirit, who, himself the essential Light and Truth, can guide us into all truth, that he would illumine what is dark, correct what is wrong, and elevate what is grovelling within us; that we may be brought assuredly to know, whether the words of ancient

scripture, which profess to be a divine revelation, are of men or of God!

Here then, at the very commencement of the argument, we are prepared to yield whatever advantage may spring from pleading a spreading and prosperous cause; by allowing to the objector, that the mere fact of the success of the gospel, cannot become any evidence of its divine original. Abstractedly considered, I can conceive of the gospel being confined to Judea, or becoming in any degree more or less prevalent, without its claims to a celestial origin being in the least affected. It would be clearly a groundless assumption to say, that because the system of law established at Rome once prevailed over the civilized world, it had pretensions to divinity; and certainly we have no better reason to insist, that the system of christian doctrine is divine, from the simple fact of its having been extensively propagated. Whether the fact of success shall be an evidence at all, and in what degree, must depend, as we shall see, on *collateral* and *attendant circumstances;* and these may bring us to determine, that it is no evidence, or a secondary evidence, or an evidence of the first magnitude.

We are also willing to concede, that if the success of the gospel can only be a witness of its authenticity as it is associated with prophetic and miraculous attestations, it can be no direct evidence on the subject. If it is only the fulfilment of prophecy, then it may prove the truth of prophecy so fulfilled; if it is the mere effect of miraculous interposition, then it may be employed to shew the reality of its cause; but beyond this it cannot be consistently pressed. Dr. Paley has contented himself with using it in this way; and has even ventured on the assertion, that it can be employed in no other. Reluctant as we necessarily are to differ

in the least from such an authority, we must be allowed to express an honest and deliberate conviction, that, in this instance, this eminent christian advocate has not made the most of the argument. We do think, that the propagation of the gospel may claim to be received as a *separate* and *independent* evidence of the truth of revelation, though no prophecy should have been announced, and no miracle performed. It is our intention to endeavour to establish this position, and we have some relief while making the attempt, in the reflection, that should we not succeed to our wishes, the argument will still stand where it was found.

Let it, however, be understood, that we are far from contending, that the action of natural means, and the concurrence of secondary causes, must necessarily nullify the evidence supplied by the progress of christian truth in the early centuries. They may undoubtedly be accessory to the event in a high degree; and the presumption is, that they would be so, if the revelation were genuine; since, in such a case, the author of revelation would be the author of providence; and it might well be expected that He would make the events of his government subordinate to the dispensation of his will. All that it is important to maintain, is, that although they may contribute to the event, they are not of themselves *adequate* to its establishment. For we are fully prepared to admit, that if the propagation of the gospel can be fairly and entirely accounted for by the action of secondary causes and physical principles, the fact must cease to be an immediate evidence of its divinity; and, consequently, it can be received only to the rank of a distinct and an independent evidence, on shewing, that it could never have been effected without the influence of supernatural causes.

These several admissions, while they yield every thing which the misbeliever can require, have gradually discovered to us the line of inquiry proper to be pursued. Amidst the manifold circumstances attendant on the propagation of the gospel, we must seek for those which indicate the presence and operation of a supernatural agency, as this alone can be allowed to weigh in the argument. It may probably give distinctness and facility to our search, if we suffer it to be governed by the following hypothetical propositions:

I. That if a system of religious opinions and principles, *unlike* every thing suggested to the mind of man for four thousand years, should prevail rapidly and extensively over every *existing* system, there would be *some* reason to suppose it was aided by supernatural influence.

II. That if this system should prevail without the assistance of *suitable* and *efficient instrumentality*, the evidence for supernatural agency would become *stronger*.

III. That if this system should prevail, not only without adequate instrumentality, but against *fixed, continued*, and *universal opposition*, the evidence would be *yet stronger* and *more decisive*.

IV. That if this supposed system should prevail, not only over these disadvantages, but equally over the very *propensities* and *principles* of *human nature*, then the evidence would be *demonstrative* and *paramount*.

We assume that no deist who has a respect for right reasoning, and is familiar with the nature of moral evidence, will object to these propositions: and it only remains to ascertain, how far this merely

hypothetical argument may be fairly transferred to the support of the christian religion.

I. Our first proposition is, That if a system of religious opinions and principles, *unlike* every thing suggested to the mind of man, should prevail rapidly and extensively over every *existing* system, there would be *some* reason to suppose it was aided by supernatural influence.

Up to the period when the christian religion was promulgated, the pagan world had possessed the fullest opportunity for religious inquiry. Age after age, in long succession, the lights of science and the aids of philosophy had been called in to assist their researches. The legislator had been stimulated to attain the best religious conceptions, to give sanction to his laws; the seer, to establish his inspiration; and the sage, to bring credit to his wisdom: and many an aspiring mind, unconsciously sympathizing with a more spiritual state, had become restless with the emptiness of this life, and had sought, but vainly sought, to pierce through the darkness of futurity. At length an opinion generally prevailed, that human reason, in its most favoured condition, could not advance farther than it had already proceeded. The rulers of Rome proclaimed, that all religions were equally good, provided they did not infringe on the common principles which united all together as the offspring of one parent stock; and the philosophers of Athens terminated all their speculations by inscribing an altar to "The Unknown God;" as if to flatter their wounded vanity by declaring, that since *they* could know no more, no more could be known by *man*.

It is apparent, that the pretensions of any new sect, exhibited at such a time, would be burdened with

peculiar disadvantages. The few would conclude, that it could have no better claim on attention than all which had preceded it; and the million would remain firmly devoted to their national establishments, made venerable by their antiquity, and valuable by being incorporated with the welfare and existence of the commonwealth.

At this period, however, an attempt was made to propagate the religion of Christ. Its advocates maintained, that an individual who had lived in Judea, and had been crucified as an impostor, was, nevertheless, not only a great Prophet, but the true God; and, consequently, though he died in ignominy, he was reigning in invisible glory. They taught, that it was alone by the sacrifice of his death, that sin could be forgiven, and by the gift of his Spirit that our nature could be restored. They asserted that the present life was wholly subordinate to one that is to come; and they insisted, not so much on the endless life of the soul, as on the *resurrection* and *immortality* of the *body*. They denounced the wisdom of men as foolishness with God; and refused to compromise the honours of their Teacher and God, by allowing any idol name to be put in rivalship with his.

Here then, apart from its merits or demerits, are the elements of a religious system, every way *unlike* all previous and existing systems. Ear had not heard, eye had not seen,—the excursive imagination, after centuries of trial, had not conceived any thing bearing resemblance to this. It is not such a difference as serves to distinguish one school of science from another, where the peculiarities of each sect rest on premises admitted by all; it is universal and complete. It acts not as the reformer of abuses, and the institutor of new rites and practices; but proceeds at once to

establish new and opposite principles. If it differed amazingly in creed and visible profession, it differed yet more essentially in this particular,—that while the uniform principle of paganism makes the sanctions of a future world subordinate to the good of the present, the Gospel renders the concerns of this life totally subordinate to those of eternity. It was not, therefore, possible for the claims of this new religion to be accepted, without annihilating those of every other.

Yet this new religion, coming at such a time, setting forth such "strange doctrine," and refusing alliance to any thing which existed, did spread itself, within a very limited period, over the whole civilized globe. Now, on this simple fact, we have to request two things. First, let it be remembered, how difficult it is to effect a general change of opinion on any subject under many favouring circumstances; and that it is inexpressibly more difficult to realise such a change on religious subjects than on all others. Then, secondly, we have calmly to ask, whether it is credible, that a system of faith, so uncongenial to the mind of man, as never, by any train of thinking, to have been suggested, so hostile as to allow nothing to stand in competition with itself, could obtain so rapidly, not over one nation, but over many; not over many nations of no religious persuasions, but over these nations pre-engaged by all the force of education, prejudice, and interest, to uphold the existing modes of worship, without the concurrence of supernatural influence?

The point of this question is not to be broken by an allusion to the supposed effect of prophetic or miraculous testimony, as attending the propagation of the gospel. My argument is with the unbeliever; and he does not admit the reality of this testimony. He is therefore reduced to this dilemma:—he must

either shew, on fair and incontestible principles, that so wonderful an effect could have been produced without the intervention of preternatural causes, or he must yield the argument by ascribing it to "the finger of God."

II. Let us now pass to the second proposition:—That if a system of religious opinions shall prevail without the assistance of an *adequate* and *efficient instrumentality*, there will be *increased* evidence of supernatural agency.

And no where shall we find such a proposition illustrated so completely as in the history of the christian religion. For, what were the instruments, what were the persons engaged in the first propagation of the christian faith? There was, chiefly, its professed Author. He was the son of a mechanic. He lived in poverty and died in shame; and when his life and ministry were closed, he had but few sincere followers. Of these, twelve were the most considerable; and they were tent-makers, fishermen, and tax-gatherers. They were poor, unknown, and illiterate. So ignorant, that they were with difficulty brought to comprehend the professed character of their Teacher, and the end of his mission; and so cowardly, that they fled from him in danger, and left him to expire alone. They were not only without the aids which are derived from power, wealth, and letters; but they had so little worldly sagacity, that they denounced all these assistants—the fascinations of rhetoric, the riches of the wealthy, the wisdom of the wise. Connect with these particulars, that they were Jews, while their message was meant principally for the Gentiles who despised and abhorred them; and that their pretensions were to be tried, not by Barbarians, but by Greece and Rome; which, for superior intelligence, were then

denominated the eyes of the world;—and you have a running description of the character and circumstances of the first advocates of christianity.

But are these the men, who, without all supernatural aid, are to establish a new and an unpalatable religion? Are these the men before whom philosophy is to be perplexed, eloquence struck dumb, and power confounded? Are these the men who are to root up all existing religions long planted, and to bear in triumph the cross of their condemned Master from Judea to Britain? If it were possible to ascribe the success of the gospel to any mere instrumentality,—is *this* the instrumentality to accomplish it? Then does infidelity make larger demands on my faith, than christianity itself, since there is no inconsistency in believing that a divine energy may render the most inadequate means effectual to their end; but if this divine energy is refused me, I am compelled to believe, that weakness may overcome might, that ignorance is superior to science, and that the effect sustains no relation to its cause!

Suppose some twelve men, poor fishermen and mechanics, dwelling on one of our coasts, were to conceive themselves inspired; and under this persuasion, which they had confirmed in each other by a variety of juggling tricks, they were to forsake their calling, and make their way to our metropolis. Suppose that these men, unknown and ungifted, without knowledge of the world, and ignorant of the constitution, both in church and state, should declare that they were commissioned to effect a reform in the established religion, and should call upon our senators, schoolmen, and priests, to unite with them in the proposed undertaking,—how, think ye, would such a call be received? Would their pretensions obtain the least serious

consideration? Would they not be subjected to corporal chastisement as idle vagrants, who made their conceits a cloak for their laziness; and be sent back to their homes, to earn their bread in honesty and quietness?

But suppose these very men should profess, not to reform an existing religion, but to reveal a new one. Suppose that this new religion was of such a nature, as to have no principle in common with any known religion, so that it could only succeed by demolishing all others. And suppose that they imagined their commission to extend, not merely to their country, but to the whole world, and that they announced, that, through themselves, the altars of France, and Germany, and Italy, and Spain, and Greece, and Egypt, were to be overthrown, and a strange religion introduced; while they remained profoundly ignorant of the manners, the language, and the geography of the countries they were thus to subdue. Is it credible, that such dreams could be realized? Can such a case as is supposed, be entertained by any sober mind for a moment? Yet the Deist must believe this, and more than this; for the imagined case is considerably below the actual fact, if the propagation of the gospel is to be explained on deistical principles.

III. Let us now ascend another degree in the scale of the argument, by advancing to the THIRD proposition: That if a system of religious opinions shall prevail, not only without adequate instrumentality, but against *determined and universal opposition*, there will be *greater* and *more decided* evidence of a supernatural agency.

It was to be expected that a new religion, so strange in its nature as the christian religion, and admitting of no community of interests with the existing religions, would be strongly resisted. Accordingly, all

previous history supplies us with no resemblance to the severity and extent of the persecutions by which it was assailed. None had an interest in helping it; all had an interest in its suppression. The Philosopher was opposed to it. He could not endure a religion which declared the wisdom of the world to be foolishness with God; which swept away his endless distinctions and metaphysical subtilties, as the mere illusions of a feeble mind; which brought him down on a level with the ignorant and the poor, and commanded him to become a child that he might be wise. The Priest of every false religion was opposed to it. His religion was constructed for worldly purposes. That his temple should be occupied by many gods, he was well content; for the offerings would increase as the deities were multiplied; but if they were all to be exploded, the worshippers would cease, and the craft would fail. His reputation with the people, the gains of his vocation, and the preservation of his very official existence, made him an enemy at every point. The Magistrate was opposed to it. He had, indeed, peculiar reasons for watching it with a jealous eye. Every other religion had not only "asked leave of the State to be," but had been an integral part of the government, and was made wholly subservient to its authority and prosperity. But here was a religion, that, for the first time, claimed the right to stand alone. It refused to be incorporated with any civil institutions. It dared to tell to Cæsar, what were, and what were not, his dues; and it resisted all encroachments on its rights with inflexible determination. This was sure to provoke and inflame the indignation of despotic power, which, till then, had never heard of any limits to itself, except what itself prescribed. The People were opposed to it. They were satisfied with things

as they stood. They were devoted to a religion composed of external rites and plenary indulgences; which gave them gods frail like themselves; which brought them so near to their deities that they might hope one day to enjoy an apotheosis; and which delighted them by the magnificence of its shews, the beauty of its statues, and the grandeur of its temples. Upon that religion, which had none of these attractions, they looked down with unspeakable contempt and hatred; and they pronounced its followers to be atheists, for they could not conceive of a God who was not to be seen, nor of worship without a temple, nor of piety without ceremonies.

It might have been thought, that, amidst this general opposition to the christian religion, one exception would be found, in the history of the Jews. They had been taught to expect the Messiah; and they possessed the testimonies which were given to his character and appearance. But they, above all others, were most inveterately opposed to Jesus of Nazareth. They had brought themselves to look for a temporal prince, whose reign should be more splendid than Solomon's, and who should make them the chief of nations. They could not, therefore, endure to find their Deliverer in a poor and penniless individual, of low parentage, of no ambition, and destitute of all the "pomp and circumstance" of life. They hated him with perfect hatred; and gave themselves no rest till they had inflicted on him a death, at once the most cruel and the most ignominious.*

* See this argument ably treated in "Sumner's Evidence;" a work which is well adapted to shew that the evidence which supports Christianity, like the doctrine it discloses, is inexhaustible. I regret that the book did not reach my hand till this discourse was written out and preached.

The fire of persecution, which had been kindled for their Lord, was preserved to consume his disciples. They were compelled to flee from city to city, and from province to province; the Jew accusing them to the Romans, and the Romans delivering them over to the Jews. Every where they were spoken against, calumniated, vilified. Whatever crimes were committed, the Christians had done them: whatever disturbances arose, the Christians had fomented them: whatever judgments came from heaven—famine, pestilence, and war—the Christians had procured them.

At length, Nero, that incarnation of cruelty and crime, ascended the imperial throne; and, jealous of the pleasure others might derive from it, took the brand of persecution into his own hand. The Christians were proscribed; they were disqualified for civil office; and their property was confiscated. They were tortured, crucified, sawn asunder, torn to pieces, and consumed over slow fires; while this fiendish tyrant found malignant joy in the sufferings he had created. Many of his successors followed too closely in his steps; and with so much apparent advantage, that, more than once, they were addressed and applauded by their subjects, as "*having extirpated the superstition of Christ.*"

Now, conceive of a professed religion, the Founder of which was so unsuccessful in his attempts, as to be executed as a malefactor before he had fulfilled three years of his assumed mission: Conceive of its being taken up, after his death, by a handful of men, who, if it were sought to make a good cause miscarry, were the very persons to be selected—so ignorant, so feeble, so unskilful. Conceive of them as equally opposed by the learned, the wealthy, and the powerful; by the prejudices and interests of the people: Conceive of the

government ultimately arranged against them, as the most formidable the world ever saw, from its despotic character and almost universal empire: Conceive, finally, of the disciples of this profession offering no resistance, combining for no self-defence, but enduring the severest persecutions with pliancy and submission, till they perished by their adversaries:—And then let it be said, whether it is possible, that such means, in the face of such opposition, could have carried the religion of Christ over the world? Must we not rather be forced into the admission, that if the "weak things of the world" have thus been opposed by "the mighty," and yet have been victorious, it has been so ordered by a superior Providence, that the "excellency of the power may be conspicuously of God, and not of men?"

We are aware that some stress has been laid on the advantages derived to a cause from persecution; and perhaps this sentiment has not always been advanced with sufficient qualification. For a cause to be really and ultimately benefited by persecution, it must be essentially good. Persecution may, indeed, give an ephemeral advantage even to error and fanaticism, by transferring sympathy to the sufferers, and by fixing a wavering mind in its creed: and the progress of truth may sometimes be checked, for a period, by its influence. But this is all that it can do either to serve a bad cause, or to impede a good one. Error, too feeble to meet the continued trial, will be overlaid by the rigid hand of opposition, and stifled or crushed; while truth, gathering elasticity from resistance, and vigour from conflict, will be trained, by this painful discipline, for easy and final conquest.

The infidel, therefore, to urge the advantage of persecution to the christian cause, must admit its

truth, and so yield the point in controversy; or he must maintain, against all sense and all history, that gross imposture on the world has been permanently and essentially assisted, by having every eye open to detect its falsehood, and every hand erected to thrust it down!

IV. We now arrive at the ultimate proposition in the argument:—That if a system of religion should prevail, not merely over the difficulties we have stated, but equally over the *very propensities* and *principles* of human nature, then the evidence for supernatural influence would be *paramount* and *complete*. This is manifestly the most material portion of our subject: like the key-stone of an arch, it is necessary to give unity and strength to all the component parts. Allow me to crave a candid and close attention.

It is important, at the very outset, to bear distinctly in mind, that our argument has nothing to do with man, as he may be affected by circumstances; but with man, as he is essentially in himself. Our inferences are not to be derived from those tastes, prejudices, and opinions which may be local and artificial; but from those elements of his nature, which in themselves are immutable and universal. The more, therefore, our minds are disengaged from whatever circumstances may be supposed to ameliorate or degrade, to refine or obscure, to constrain or alter human nature, the more shall we be in a state of meetness to conceive justly of the subject before us.*

* It will be apparent, that throughout this argument, the *nature of man*, and what is *essential* to it, are spoken of in a qualified sense. We are not now to know that man ever *was* other than what he *is;* and what he actually is, always and uniformly, may truly be termed his nature or constitution.

Man, as a creature, is of mixed and curious composition. The faculties first developed in his existence are those of appetite. These are succeeded by those of passion; and passion is followed by the developement of reason. These very different powers are frequently in conflict with each other; but whether they are amicable or contentious, they are entirely governed by one common principle —*selfishness*. Appetite may be controlled by love, and desire may be mastered by reason; but, in both cases, the victory will be effected by a regard to self.—Ambition is the desire to glorify self; avarice, the desire to enrich self; pleasure, the desire to indulge self. The action may be manifold; the principle is uniform and one.

There is another position which appears to be equally clear and simple— That the exercise of this selfish principle in man is limited in its range to *visible* and *worldly* objects. It has no interest in spiritual things—no affection for invisible and distant realities. It is confined to the sense and science of the world; and life is occupied and consumed in eagerly seeking the gratification which it will afford. To put at the farthest remove the ills of life, to multiply the sources of earthly enjoyment, to increase the honours of a worldly reputation — these are the acknowledged pursuits of man. And should he sometimes be found to relinquish his pursuit, like the full man who is satiated with his object, or the disappointed man who recoils from it, this arises from no change of his nature; he is a worldling still; and when hope and desire once more put him in motion, he will assuredly gravitate to the world.

These principles, selfishness and worldliness, are so evidently at the basis of human conduct and character, as not to leave the statement briefly given, open

to serious disputation. The philosopher admits and approves them. The legislator has uniformly assumed their existence; and has sought only to regulate their operations for the social good. And even the pretensions which have been made to religion, bear the same testimony, since the pagan world presents us with no religion which does not accommodate itself to these principles—which does not flatter the reason of man, or pander to his appetites and passions.

Let us now turn from the principles which are in man, to those which are revealed in the New Testament. Amidst the variety of novel and important subjects here brought under our attention, the most careless observer must perceive, that there are two prevailing principles—spirituality and benevolence. The world, as the opposite of spirituality, is every where denounced in most unsparing language. "To be carnally minded is death." We are to is "come out from the world and be separate." "The desire of the eye, the desire of the flesh, and the pride of life"—wealth, power, and pleasure—are all to be renounced. We are to "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." It is premptorily said, "If any man love the world, the love of God is not in him." And we are directed to regard, not "the things which are seen and temporal," but "the things which are unseen and eternal."

The same testimony is borne against the selfishness of our nature. We are not to seek "our own things," but each one the benefit of others. We are to love and forgive, not our friends, but our foes in their bitterest attempts to vex and injure us. A charity is enjoined, which is the ceaseless antagonist of pride

and vanity, of ill-will and resentment, of envy and revenge. Self is to be denied, to be crucified, to be annihilated. We are to live, not to ourselves, but to God. His love is to be the motive, his will the rule, and his glory the end of every action and purpose. We are to glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his. Our circumstances are to be resigned to his disposal; our inclinations are to be absorbed in his pleasure; and we are to love him above all things on earth or in heaven. And these statements are not of detached and unfrequent occurrence; they pervade the whole work; so that to abstract from the New Testament the portions which illustrate and enforce these principles, would be to destroy the book.

Here, then, we find the religion of Christ and the nature of man in diametrical opposition. My argument does not require me to determine where the blame of this contrariety shall rest, but only to maintain, that it is of such a character as to demand a change of nature on one side or the other, to bring them into a state of agreement. But, to suppose a change in a religion which professes to be divine, is to destroy it; and to suppose that man should change his own nature, is unphilosophical and absurd. Had man been required merely to restrain existing principles, or to sacrifice some particular passion, the requisition might have been met, since one passion might have been employed to subdue another; but when he is called upon to deny himself, and to realize a change which is so total as to be indicated in this book as "a new birth," "a new creation," and "regeneration," it is manifestly to himself impossible. Self cannot conquer self, any more than Beelzebub can overcome Beelzebub; nor can any being effect his own regene-

ration, any more than he can become the parent of his original existence!

The inference, therefore, to which we are inevitably brought, is this, that, as the *nature* of the christian religion is *essentially* opposed to the *nature* of man, it is *morally* and *utterly* impossible for any one man cordially to receive it, but "as it is given him from heaven." And if not possible to one man, then not to many; and if not to many, then not to the world; so that the gospel, at every step of its propagation, cannot boast of a *single convert* to itself, without the aid of a *moral* and *supernatural* influence!

We ought not to admit the force of this argument with reluctance, because it has not been sufficiently urged in former discussions. In that immense field of disquisition which the evidences of the christian religion supply, it is no subject of wonder, that every part has not been equally occupied. It must also be admitted, that of those who have most successfully illustrated the evidences of Christianity, some have not embraced its peculiarities; others have been unwilling to have their sobriety and wisdom impeached, by becoming the avowed advocates of divine influence; and most have employed the strength of their minds in elucidating its external evidences; so that while in this branch of testimony it is difficult to produce any thing new which is not valueless, there is yet a line of evidence, partly historical and partly moral, where devoted research may find its reward. The propagation of the gospel is, we apprehend, of this class; and the reason, perhaps, why it has not found its due place in the general discussion, is, that it has been treated as of an historical, and not of a mixed character. But if this evidence is to stand in its proper

light, it is legitimate, and even necessary to determine, not only what has been the success of the gospel, and what the external circumstances in which it was successful, but, especially, what was the *nature* of the religion so propagated, and what the *nature* of the beings over whom it prevailed. So that those who may have come to the inquiry with superficial views of human nature,—or a prejudice against the peculiarities of christianity,—or a fear of incurring odium with the world by following it to its consequences, have not brought with them, whatever their stores of knowledge or force of intellect, the preliminary qualifications to dispose of it with justice and efficiency.

Nor can it be any objection to our argument, that many profess the christian religion who do not recognize the doctrine of supernatural influence, and who are palpably not the subjects of it. It is fully understood, that multitudes of persons have assumed the christian name on any rather than christian principles; and they are on no account to be confounded with the sincere believer; nor can they be permitted to affect, in the least, an argument which is raised on the progress of the christian authority and doctrine over the hearts and characters of men. Such persons, indeed, like the retainers of an army, may seem to add to the pomp and magnitude of the good cause which they professedly uphold; yet are they in fact, not its strength, but its weakness in moving forward to fresh achievement.

In truth, the anomaly which is thus offered to our attention, far from weakening the argument, may be effectually used for its confirmation. For this anomaly, let it be observed, is, in extent and character, peculiar to the christian denomination. The Hindoo, the Persian, the Arabian, are usually what they profess to be. They take the name and act on the principles

of their faith; and find no impracticable difficulties in doing so; but, in christendom, there is a declared and lamentable discrepancy between the profession adopted and the principles cherished in the heart. It becomes, then, a most interesting question—how are we to account for this peculiarity? How is it, if men from interest, or reputation, or conviction, are brought to profess Christianity, they are not also brought to conclude, that it would be still more to their interest and satisfaction to possess it? How is it that the judgment may be convinced, and the mind not be reconciled? That men may admit the truth of Christianity, may preach in its defence, and enrich the literature of their country by enlightened and eloquent disquisitions in its behalf, and yet remain alienated in heart from its principles and spirit? It is, in our judgment, impossible to resolve this difficulty without recurring to the inference which we have previously sought to establish; that the nature of this religion is at variance with the nature of man; and that it requires the influence of a spirit better than his own to effect the reconciliation.

The acceptance of the argument for which we are pleading, will also provide us with the solution of another difficulty, which has long embarrassed the question of evidence—the inefficacy of miraculous testimony as attached to revelation. The sceptic maintains, that a real miracle, wrought in support of a revelation, must be irresistible evidence of its truth, and that if he saw a man raised from the dead, he should at once, and of necessity, believe; and the inference he would derive from this proposition, is, that the miracles which were professedly wrought in favour of the gospel could not have been real, since they had not this uniform and certain effect. The

christian advocate has sought to relieve the subject of this difficulty, by shewing truly that the Jews resisted the miracle, by ascribing it to demoniacal, and the Pagans, to magical influence. But it must be conceded that the question still returns upon us—Why did they ascribe it to false and inadequate causes? The reply is, that they were *predisposed* to do so; and we must seek for this predisposition to reject the testimony in the *contents* of the revelation, and the *nature* of man. In ordinary circumstances, it is allowed, that it would be nearly impossible to reject a revelation in the presence of real miracle; but a revelation may be so opposed to a man's prejudices, interests, and principles, as to make it his highest wish that it were not true; and then it is consistent alike with philosophy and experience to say, that he would not believe "though one should rise from the dead." In such a case, the causes of a man's disbelief are *within himself;* and it is manifest, that if he is to receive the testimony, it must be not by any *external* agency, but by an internal and superior influence disposing him to admit the light and weight of evidence as it *already* exists.

On this principle, the account presented to us in scripture of the *variable* success of miraculous testimony, is perfectly consistent: but, if it is rejected, the subject is clogged with serious difficulty. If, as a celebrated writer contends, a miracle is a "sole and sufficient cause" to induce men to embrace the truth, then it ought to have uniform and constant success; and every one who had seen a miracle, *must* have accepted the message it was sent to confirm. The Scriptures, however, which record these miracles, give us a different report of their effect. We find many of the ancient Jews, who witnessed the miracles in the

wilderness, turning away from them to worship idols. At a later period, we find Jesus Christ, though working so many miracles, attended by but few followers, while his apostles in less extraordinary performances, after his alleged ascension, were remarkably successful. And it is worthy of observation, that the first instance of unusual success in the propagation of the gospel is ascribed, not so much to the miracle which was wrought, as to the sermon which was preached: the miracle excited their curiosity and ridicule, but the sermon went to their hearts; and the sermon, like the miracle, relied for its success on the power of the Holy Spirit which was then "poured out from on high."

Miracles, in fact, are rather of the order of *means*, than of the order of *causes;* and, like all means, they may be used to *contribute* to a result, which, of themselves, they could not secure. They are a sufficient reason why men should believe, that they may be left "without excuse;" but they have not power to constrain their faith contrary to their inclinations. The truth may be rejected in their presence; and if it is accepted, it is by an influence distinct from them—an influence, which, like the wind that bloweth, though hidden from our sight, is one of the mightiest and most important elements of the moral world.

The final portion of collateral evidence in support of our argument, is to be found in the history of religion throughout all ages. One of the most remarkable facts attendant on that religion, whose claims we are examining, is, that, whether beneath the present or former dispensations, it has always degenerated; so that, while the hints of science have been progressively improved into a beautiful system, religion, in the hands of man, has been retrograde and corrupted.

The antediluvians, who were originally possessed of the knowledge of God, speedily corrupted their way, and were cut off for their transgression. The family of Noah had the revelation enlarged to them under the most solemn circumstances; but their descendants soon departed from the worship, and retained not the knowledge, of God. They fell from the worship of a Spiritual Being to the adoration of the material elements; and, again, they fell from the worship of the powers of nature, to prostrate themselves before brutes, and reptiles, and demons. The descendants of Abraham, who were made a peculiar people, and placed beneath a peculiar economy calculated to preserve them from this degeneracy, discovered the same propensities; and when Jesus Christ came, they had, on the testimony of their own historians, made that word which they held to be divine, of "none effect" by their traditions and glosses, and were little superior to surrounding nations in knowledge, and not at all in practice.

In like manner, immediately on the propagation of the gospel by the disciples of Christ, it had to contend, not merely with its enemies, but with the heresies of its avowed friends; and when, to the eye of the world, it achieved a perfect triumph under Constantine, it was, in truth, so corrupted, that its original lustre was eclipsed, and many of its principles forgotten. Incorporated with the world, the work of corruption went on rapidly; and this professedly Christian Church, while boasting of her expanded temporal dominion, became essentially antichristian, and persecuted the faith she pretended to espouse. Truth was driven for shelter to the valleys and fastnesses of Piedmont, till the Reformation came; but the Reformation so quickly degenerated as to require to be reformed, and from

Geneva and Worms, Augsburg and Prague, the glory is departed.

In our own day, privileged as it is, we have the same process of defection and corruption before our eyes. Throughout all Christendom, how difficult it is to find any thing like religion undisguised, untarnished by the touch of man! How great a disparity between religion as it appears amongst men, and religion as represented on the pages of the New Testament! Her simplicity has been lost in the glare of meretricious ornament; her spirituality has been extinguished by worldly alliance; her doctrines have been explained away by distorted criticism; and her principles have been perverted by earthly policy. She has been made the slave of superstition, the mask of infidelity, the creature of temporal power, and the mistress of unlicensed cupidity. Her name has been retained, while herself has been crucified. Opinions have been held, dispositions indulged, and practices pursued, which were fatal to her existence; and these things have been made specious by christian philosophers, have been eulogized by christian historians, have been celebrated by christian poets, and have been consecrated and commended from christian pulpits.

How are we to account for this invariable and universal propensity to corrupt and pervert a religion which is yet held to be divine? If any moral deduction can be legitimately drawn from any historical testimony, are we not fully authorized in deciding, that since men are so unwilling to accept of religion as it is, and are so desirous of making it what it never can become, there must be an essential opposition of the principles which are in it, to the principles which are in man? And does it not warrant us, with equal confidence, to infer, that a religion which shall be

successfully promulgated under *such* circumstances, must be so by *supernatural influence?* A flame living on the very bosom of the deep; opposed by all the winds of heaven; often obscured, nearly extinguished, always resisted; yet rising from apparent exhaustion and decay into new brightness; enlarging the circle on which it shines age after age; and smiling on the elements which are battling against its existence; must be sustained by ethereal fires!

Now, what is the sum of the entire argument? Here is a religious system, denominated Christian, which enters the world at a most inauspicious period, supposing it to be an imposture. It has not one principle in common with the religions which then prevailed. It is attempted to be propagated by a few persons who are signally disqualified for the undertaking, and are hated of all nations. It is opposed, from the very first, by Jew and Gentile, and chiefly by those who had most power and influence in their hands. Moreover, this religion is hostile to human opinion, human prejudice, human interest, human nature; and this is apparent, from the admitted nature of man, and the avowed principles of the gospel, as well as from the facts, that when men have been induced to adopt the christian name, they have remained at enmity to the christian faith, and that there has been, in every age, a predominant disposition to misunderstand and misrepresent, to pervert and degrade it. Yet has this religion been propagated over the earth with a facility altogether unparalleled by any art or science—yet has it found a place for itself in many a mind and country, to which the simplest mathematical demonstrations are, at this moment, unsolved problems!

What then is the conclusion? It is, it must be this—that the religion of Christ could not have been

propagated by any *earthly power*—that it could not have been propagated by any *mere external agency* of Providence—that it could have been propagated *only* by a *spiritual* and *supernatural* influence addressed to the perceptions and affections of man;—and, therefore, that the religion of Christ is DIVINE, and its propagation through all ages is a DISTINCT, INDEPENDENT, and SPEAKING EVIDENCE of its DIVINITY!

It might, perhaps, have been expected, when entering on this discussion, that I should give a leading place to the opposition of Mr. Gibbon on this line of christian testimony, and should institute a serious examination into his "secondary causes." Separately, however, from the circumstance, that this examination has been made by many hands whose works are generally accessible, it will now be seen, that the course of argument I have pursued made such an exercise wholly unnecessary; since, if it is, as I trust, established, not only the secondary causes he adduces, but *all* second causes, are totally inadequate to the effect produced. Yet, with a particular reference to the younger part of this audience, I will take this occasion to express an honest conviction, which I cannot avoid entertaining, that a deference has been paid to these "secondary causes" which they do not deserve, and which they would never have received, had they been associated with a less name than that of Gibbon. I will venture to affirm, that the causes he has assigned are not only inadequate to the end proposed—they are mostly inappropriate, and even contrary to that end. The slightest remark will be sufficient to support this affirmation.

For instance, the first cause he assigns for the extraordinary success of the gospel, is "the intolerant

zeal of the Christians." This is really saying, that the mere circumstance of the Christians having refused to tolerate any thing in the established religions, became the inducement for these very religions to tolerate the Christians!

The next cause assigned, is, "the doctrine of a future life which christianity promulgated." But this is a begging of the question: for, if this religion announced doctrines to the world which were the source of its success, and which the schools of Greece and Rome could never attain, may not those doctrines prove its divinity, and thus its success be involved in its origin? Besides, it is ascribing more to the doctrine than it has achieved. Unhappily, associated as it was with the resurrection of the body and eternal judgment, it was not an acceptable doctrine to men; and it became, instead of a reason of faith, to the "Jew a stumbling-block, and to the Greek foolishness." In our own day, we have seen no better effects produced by it. Mr. Gibbon never gave us reason to think that *his* scepticism was in the least subdued by the force of this captivating doctrine.

Another assigned cause for the success of the gospel is to be found in "the miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive church." Here, again, is a sophistical attempt to slip from the argument. Either the propagation of the gospel was attended by miracle, or it was not. If it was, then miracle proves its truth; if it was not, then its whole success must be ascribed to the sleight-of-hand performances of a few knavish impostors. To assist us in judging of this latter conclusion, let it be said, whether the miraculous pretensions of Prince Hohenlohe, as authorized by the Roman Church, are more likely to generate faith or infidelity towards the claims of that particular community.

Again, "the pure and austere morals of the Christians" are put down as another cause of this success. But purity and austerity here, must be comparative expressions; so that the pure and austere morals of the Christians must have been such in comparison with the impure and lax morals of the Pagans. To accept this argument, then, we are reduced to the absurdity of holding, that the gospel was propagated by its rigid and pure morality, and that this morality was made acceptable to the Gentiles by their comparative impurity and licentiousness!

Another source of this success is discovered "in the unity and discipline of the primitive church." We are prepared to admit, that the congregational unity and order, which Mr. Gibbon concedes was observed in the earliest churches, were well adapted to answer the ends proposed. But, unhappily, this is not what he means. "All the unity and discipline of the first Christians," he says, "consisted of faith and charity:" this, he thinks, *not sufficient;* and he refers to a *later* period, for the principles which he regards as contributing to the progress of truth. Now, we readily agree with him, that faith and charity alone were not likely to aid a cause in a world destitute of either; but we must be excused if we differ from him in referring, contrary to history and the reason of things, the success of a system to its corruption.

Then it is urged, that another cause is to be found in the "scepticism which generally prevailed on the popular religions." But is not this saying, that it would be easier to *create* a principle of faith, than to *correct* it when erroneously directed? Who ever thought, that a state of incredulity was a *moral preparation* for a state of faith? Would it be more difficult to proselyte a sincere worshipper of the material

elements, than to have brought over Hume or Gibbon to the cordial reception of the religion of Christ?

Then, as though conscious these reasons were not to be trusted, an attempt is made to explain away the spread of the gospel, by shewing that it was "not universal." This is, indeed, reducing the subject to a mere question of geography; and with as much wisdom and truth may it be urged, that the rain and the light, that reason and conscience are not from heaven, because they are not of equal and universal distribution.

Finally, It is asserted, "that though the triumphs of Christianity were great, those of Mohammedism are also great and surprising." It has, however, been already laid down as a principle, that the evidence of divinity, arising from the success of a system, depends not on the naked fact of its having been successful, but on the circumstances under which it succeeded. And it is really impossible for any two systems to differ more entirely in this particular than do Mohammedism and Christianity. Mohammed was of high extraction, allied to the first families in Mecca, and the chiefs of the country: Jesus Christ was of poor and low parentage, and had no connexions of the least worldly importance. Mohammed sought to accomplish his purpose by art and secrecy: but Jesus Christ taught the people publicly in the cities and market-places. Mohammed's first care was to secure to himself those members of his family and connexions, who were considerable by their wealth, their influence, and their skill in arms: Jesus Christ sought his disciples amongst those who were as destitute of all worldly influence and relationship as himself. Mohammedism only professed to be a reform of the existing religion where it spread: Christianity was

positively destructive of the existing pagan systems. Mohammedism enlisted national prejudice in its favour, by claiming relation to Abraham and Ishmael, the venerated fathers of the people addressed: Christianity, by the abrogation of the Mosaic institutions, was hateful to the Jews, and by its being a graft on the Jewish scriptures, was, in the highest degree, unpalatable and nauseous to the Gentile world. Mohammedism prevailed over a people, ignorant and barbarous, and having but little stake in any established modes of worship: Christianity was spread in Jerusalem, and Athens, and Rome, where men were most enlightened, and where a strange religion would undergo the severest inquisition and resistance. Mohammedism accommodated itself to the nature of man as he was, by promising him to luxuriate in those sensual indulgences and carnal delights which he most desired: Christianity insisted that his desires must be mortified, his passions subdued, his nature regenerated, if he attained to a pure, spiritual, and immortal blessedness. Mohammedism was propagated by worldly policy, civil power, and the sword; and its highest honours were decreed to those who courageously fought the battles of the faith: Christianity refused all alliance with earthly power; declared that those who used the sword in her cause should perish by it; that her weapons were not carnal, but spiritual; and commanded her followers to meet resistance and persecution with meekness, submission, and forgiveness. — But why should the contrast be pursued any farther? If an impostor were concerting means to promote his deceit, would he not do as Mohammed did? And if he were to seek his object, by tracking the footsteps of Christ, would he not be a madman rather than a knave? In the use of such means,

was it not an *impossibility* that Mohammed should fail? Was it not equally impossible that Jesus Christ should succeed, except his religion were sustained by the divine potency of supernatural influence?

Such are the arguments by which such a man as Gibbon seeks to invalidate the force of christian evidence! So great is the weakness of the strongest mind, when, through its own perversity, it attempts to make "the worse the better reason!" Not that we complain of this celebrated writer for holding sceptical opinions; nor, if holding them, for taking occasion to avow and defend them. This would be uncandid and unjust. Our complaint is, that, choosing to oppose the christian religion, he should have done it with such sophistry, such malignity, such hypocrisy, such unaccountable levity. A man of any noble sentiments, or any correct views, if he were, by the force of wrong conviction, obliged to declare himself against the popular faith, would do it with concern and seriousness; but for an individual to annihilate, as he thinks, the dearest hopes which ever visited the world, and sustained, at least, by the best evidence ever presented; and then to laugh and sneer in bitter merriment and scorn on the wretchedness and hopelessness he has created, is an unutterable outrage on all philosophy and on all humanity!

Yet it is well. Providence in this, as in other cases, has ordained, that the antidote shall grow where the poison is found. The thoughtless and the licentious, it is true, may be fascinated by the writings of this heartless philosopher; but the sober and earnest enquirer will be recovered from the intrigues of the historian, by the dispositions of the man. Let Gibbon receive his due. As a classical historian, he has obtained an imperishable name: but that name is

scathed by infidelity. It would have been entitled to the gratitude and admiration of mankind, but for the curse of scepticism which has gone over it, and which withers up the graces, and extinguishes the moral dignity of man, by destroying his sympathy and relationship with the celestial world!

But where, all this time, are the triumphs of Deism? Why has this shrewd objector sought to neutralize the success of the gospel by a train of secondary causes, and by opposing to the triumphs of the cross those of the crescent, when it was so much *more appropriate* to have adduced the conquests of infidelity and deism? Deism! which, as we are told, is "as old as the creation," whose creed is written in the firmament, whose law is printed on every man's conscience, and whose lights are sufficient, without revelation, to teach us whatever we ought to know or to perform: Deism! incumbered by no priestcraft, shrouded by no mysteries, subject to none of the imperfections attending on oral and traditional communications: Deism! so flattering to human reason, so accommodated to human desire, so boastful of her beneficence and philanthropy; and whose voice, like that of the spheres, is distinctly heard through all speech and all language: surely this is the system, if any, which shall find at once, and without difficulty, universal acceptance and dominion. But where are the triumphs of deism? Where her apostles? Where her altars? Where her worshippers? What nation has she illuminated? What superstition has she subdued? Her creed is written legibly in the heavens—Who has been edified by it? She possesses the antidote of human misery — To whom has it been effectually dispensed? If we listen to her advocates, she is sufficient of herself to bless mankind; if we consult her history, none has she blessed—no where has she triumphed!

Yes—I stand corrected. Deism has triumphed. Once, and in our own day, she has triumphed. Availing herself of the wretchedness of a people galled by the fetters of superstition and slavery, she spoke of illumination, liberty, renovation, and social good. Her voice passed over their chafed spirits like the breath of heaven. In evil hour they threw themselves recklessly into her hands; and Infidelity was enthroned in the very heart of the civilized world. All existing institutions were destroyed—all existing ties were broken. The ordinary principles of action were despised; man was made a law to himself; and the obligations which arise from social compact and divine authority were cancelled. Earth was separated from heaven. A gross and all-consuming selfishness sprang up. Virtue was stunted and stultified. Vice became monstrous and gigantic. All things became ominous, dark, and dreadful. Men's hearts failed them for fear. They would have retraced their steps; but there was no return!

The crisis came—the storm burst. Hell from beneath was moved in that hour. Man became a fiend, and woman too! Thrones, altars, temples, palaces, —all—were borne down in the sweeping tides of blood and desolation. Nothing remained to man of hope on earth; and beyond it, nothing, but the wide, deep, dark, yawning gulf of horrible, horrible annihilation! —Yes, Infidelity, thou hast triumphed!

If the ground which we have occupied throughout this exercise shall be thought tenable, then are we supplied with an *additional* motive to *devoted exertion*. It has been thought, that this evidence was

limited to the success of the gospel on its *first* promulgation; so that its brightness was becoming weaker and weaker as we receded from that early period of the church. But, if the progress of the christian religion involves essentially a moral renovation of character, which can be derived from no principle in nature or in man, then must the propagation of the gospel become an evidence, which, like that of prophecy, shall live through all ages, and be rendered the clearer and more convincing by its accumulated and accumulating triumphs. Reckon, therefore, that your earnest efforts to forward the christian cause become also an evidence of its divinity. You cannot enlighten one mind, or win one heart to the acceptance of the truth, without effecting a benefit beyond the individual in whom you are immediately interested. You not only save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins; you enkindle a light which shall contribute to the conviction of the world, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. And, as these living testimonies to the truth increase and multiply, the evidence they emit shall be so powerful and irresistible, as to silence objection and paralyze hostility; and the world will be ultimately constrained to admit of the faith of Christians, what Bolinbroke admitted of the unbelief of the Jews, that it affords an evidence of the truth of Christianity for which the infidel has no reply.

And our subject authorizes us in devoutly anticipating so blessed a consummation. The fact, that the gospel has been successful, becomes the pledge of its future and greater success. In the infancy of its existence, its author was crucified, its few disciples were scattered, its enemies were to be found every where, its friends no where; and yet it survived, and was

extensively propagated. In a more recent period, its doctrines were perverted, its authority nullified, and its testimony hidden in an unknown tongue; while it was rendered unspeakably odious, by being made subservient to temporal policy and hoodwinked superstition; and yet it burst the bands by which it was imprisoned and degraded, and arose in its original purity and majesty to judge and condemn its adversaries. In our own times, Christianity has been subjected to different and perhaps severer tests. Herbert and Hobbes, Tindal and Shaftesbury, Hume and Middleton, Volney and Diderot, Rousseau and Voltaire, have assailed her with all the refinements of wit and argument; the sciences---chemistry, geology, astronomy, and philology---have been empannelled against her; yea, all her pretensions have been exposed to the strictest inquisition. And it would be saying too little to assert, that she has suffered nothing from the ordeal. She has gained much. Her adversaries have been met by a host of men, whose works are a tower of strength and beauty in our land; and art and science, when profoundly understood and correctly applied, have only afforded fresh evidence of her truth; for by their harmony they demonstrate, that he who framed the universe, and he who inspired the Scriptures, must be one—the living and the true God!

And is it presumption to conclude that a religion, which has triumphed over such forbidding circumstances and potent obstacles, shall still succeed? Now that it has passed through every imaginable ordeal; now that no objection can be started, but what has been refuted, no difficulty occur but what has been overcome; now that it has extended its influence over one-sixth portion of the world's inhabitants, and this portion, by its intellect and energy, superior to all the residue;

is it too much to say, that its future triumphs are secure? The subject of wonder is, that it has survived so long: and, since it lives *now*, the inference is, that it will live for ever! Every movement it has already made aids its present progress, and every step of its present success will give still increasing facility and acceleration to its farther advancement; till, like the sun to which it is compared, it shall ascend far above the mists and clouds and darkness which shrouded its early course, and shall shine forth in universal influence, and receive universal homage!

It was a peculiarity of the Pagan systems, that they were made interesting to their devotees, rather by a reference to the past than the future. They pointed backward, through the long vista of countless ages, to a golden period, when the heavens were always fair, and the earth always verdant and fruitful; when men were gods, and the world a paradise; and the imagination was invited to rest on a period whose lights and glories were retiring every instant to a greater distance, and were vanishing and dying away whilst they were adored. Revelation, on the contrary, secures its hold on us, not so much by its influence on our memory, as on our hopes. It charms us, not by the glories of a sun which is setting never to rise; but of a sun which is rising never to go down. The Holy Scriptures are pregnant with this delightful subject. The poet has celebrated it; the prophet has foretold it; the saint, from Abraham until now, has died in the gladdening expectation it inspires. It is illustrated by whatever is beautiful in imagery, and forcible in description; and the very promise of its arrival sheds a sacred lustre over the record in which it is found!

Messiah is to come a second time into the world! As on his former appearance he became the example

of all that is exquisite in suffering; so on his future advent he will be the pattern of all that is exquisite in majesty and glory. He is to be the Ruler of Princes, and the King of Kings. His enemies are to be confounded, and wail because of him; and upon his head are to be many crowns. He is to have a name above every name that the lips have uttered, or the heart conceived; and to Him every knee is to bow, and every tongue to make confession. The very face of nature is to be transformed. Satan, the seducer of man, is to be cast down to the bottomless pit. Pestilence, disease, and famine are to cease. Vice, infidelity, and despotism are to be consumed by the brightness of his appearing. Man is to find every where in man a friend and a brother. Charity, Piety, and Truth are to dwell on earth as they do in heaven, and to pour out on the children of men the streams of a full and overflowing blessedness. The world is to be one vast temple, in which Messiah is to be worshipped; and every heart to be an altar, whence the incense of praise, prayer, confidence, and love shall ceaselessly arise to Him who hath loved us, and redeemed us with his own blood, to make us for ever kings and priests unto God! Such is the testimony and "spirit of prophecy."

And is it too much to say, that this long-desired period is now approaching? He must be heedless of the times in which he lives, who does not see that their aspect is most remarkable; that the state of the world is so peculiar, as to receive no illustration from the maxims and precedents of by-gone history. The kingdoms of the earth, no longer contending for local and trifling interests, are now, for the first time, dividing on the great questions of civil liberty, the rights of conscience, and the independence of man;

while the just cause has received a formidable reinforcement from nations which have sprung up in a distant quarter of the globe, as if by a magical spell, and which have already enriched our day with some splendid examples of bravery and patriotism.

Meanwhile art and science have made such discoveries as fill us with astonishment and expectation. Principles and powers have been developed and applied, so as to make the virtual force of our country one-fourth greater than the numerical strength of the population; and such facilities have been given to our intercourse with each other and the whole world, as to have the effect of nullifying the brevity of life, and doubling the term of human existence.

Religion, likewise, has been making proportionate advancement. Her friends have risen from their sloth, and shaken off their incumbrances, and are busily availing themselves of the facilities which science, invention, and literature so abundantly afford. They have been taught to forget small differences, in the accomplishment of great objects; and their union and weight have given them a moral power over the concerns of men, outstretching all comparison with the past. By voluntary association, they have formed themselves into efficient societies for the beneficent purpose of blessing the whole family of man. Already they have borne the printing press and the Bible, the elements of education and the arts of domestic life, from the Thames to the Ganges, from Iceland to the Southern Seas; and, while the seed has been sowing, the harvest is begun, and our eyes have been delighted by "scenes such as earth saw never, and such as heaven looks down to see!"

Infidelity and licentiousness, indeed, are abroad, and are endeavouring to rally under one hostile standard,

and present an imposing front to the advocates of truth. But this, so far from being deprecated, is desirable; as it will draw more distinctly than ever one simple line of separation between the good and the bad; and every man will know where are to be found the foes, and where the friends, of knowledge, liberty, and God!

Was there ever a period of such fervid, unceasing activity? Were ever the elements of good and evil so powerfully, so restlessly at work? Does not every man's heart predict the arrival of an important crisis in the affairs of mankind? Do not all things indicate the approach of that period, which is denominated at once "the day of vengeance, and the day of salvation?" Yes—it is coming—it is coming! "Watchman, what of the night?"—"The night is far spent—the day is at hand." The dawn is up—the light is come!

O what manner of men ought we to be, who awake to the opening of such a day! Were ever men distinguished by such eminent privilege, such profound responsibility? And if this may be truly said of other people, how emphatically may it be affirmed of Britons! Liberated by one of those providential interferences which so signally mark her history, from the trammels of a recent alliance, which was any thing but holy; possessed of a ministry who are devising liberal things, and by liberal things are made strong; the cradle of literature, the sanctuary of piety, the market of the world; with her sails spread to every wind of heaven, and her citizens domesticated in every latitude of the globe; Britain is now placed in the very front post of honour and of hazard. She cannot be affected alone! Her every movement vibrates to the extremities of the earth. She is set for the rising or falling of many nations. The eyes of the world are fixed on

her; and as she is true or false to her mighty trust during the next half century, her name will be crowned with supernal glory, or enveloped with deepest infamy!

O is there an individual who writes himself a Briton and a Christian, who does not sympathize with the situation of his country—the destiny of the world? At such a period, every man should be a hero, and every hero a saint, and every saint a seraph. Let the friends of liberty and religion feel, that if, in this grand crisis, the nation shall discharge her high duties, it must be by *their* fulfilling *theirs*. Away then, for ever, with those divided purposes, selfish views, and sectarian antipathies, which, if they dishonour a man at any time, make him despicable now! Let us become men of one purpose, one thought, one desire,—and that the highest and the best that ever dilated the human heart,—the restoration of man to man, and all men to God! Let our devotedness to this object pervade and animate the whole circle of our personal influence. Let it induce us to send forth on the manifold streams of our national commerce, the word of life and the means of salvation to the kingdoms of the earth. Let it render the excellent of mankind essentially one body, for the effectual propagation of divine truth at home and abroad. Fear not the issue! He that will save his life, shall lose it; and he that will lose his life, shall find it! We obey the commands of God, and are assured by his promise—The omnipotent, the good, the eternal! The church shall go forth among the nations "glorious as the sun, fair as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners."

Still one thing is wanted: and that is, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit from on high. Our subject has taught us, that a *supernatural influence* is indispensible in this great work; and the testimony of scripture is a uniform confirmation of the truth. The world may be most happily prepared by the hand of Providence for the spread of the gospel; the means in use may be admirably adapted to their end; a general expectation may exist, that we are on the eve of grand and blessed events; and a holy band of men, under the influence of irrepressible hope and charity, may have given themselves ceaselessly to the furtherance of divine truth; but all these circumstances of promise and of joy, will, of themselves, avail nothing. Like the husbandman, we may labour and toil, watch and cultivate; but like him, we shall have no one sign of fruit or life, without the superadded influences of heaven. In our busiest preparations, the sagacity of our counsels, the energy of our doings, there is a voice perpetually reminding us, that it is "not by might, nor by power, but by the spirit of Jehovah."

Not that we are to be less devoted to the use of instituted means, but more desirous of the divine blessing upon them. God would have us associate with our unyielding exertions, perfect dependence, and with our breathing hopes, fervent prayers. In the day in which he will glorify himself, he will stain the pride of all human glory; and the accepted servants of his will, shall be those who are reduced in his presence, to self-abasement, self-annihilation! O then, in this, the solemn sanctuary of his worship, let us prostrate ourselves in the dust before a present God, confessing that we are nothing to the greatness of His Majesty! And, in the dust, let us offer to Him the silent, deep, unutterable prayer of the heart, for the effectual diffusion of divine truth, the perfect redemption of a lost world: and let it not be said

that our prayer ceases, till it shall be said, "The whole earth is filled with his glory!"

Then shall our hearts be one—our minds one:—then shall strength be given to our weakness; our very errors shall have the effect of wisdom, and the unction of grace shall give freedom and force to our exertions:—then shall the Church be "filled with the Spirit," and all her instrumentality and means pervaded, like the machinery in the prophet's vision, by the intelligence and life of heaven:—then shall salvation flow through the earth like a mighty river, and the desert wastes shall become as a fruitful field, and a garden which the Lord hath blessed! And a voice from the myriads of redeemed and exulting men shall pierce the skies, and shall be repeated by the sympathetic hosts and harps of celestial glory, exclaiming—"Hallelujah! hallelujah! the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. Hallelujah! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth! Amen! Amen! Let the house of Aaron say Amen! Let all the people say Amen!"

LECTURE VIII.

THE INTERNAL EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

By SPEDDING CURWEN.

LECTURE VIII.

INTERNAL EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

HEBREWS i. 1.

God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake unto the fathers by the Prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.

THE language of our text asserts the divine authority of the gospel, and forms therefore, a suitable motto to a discourse on " the Internal Evidences of Christianity," which is the subject assigned to the discussion of this morning.

The ministers who have conducted the previous discussions in this course of Lectures, have most successfully shown that christianity is, what it professes to be, a temple whose builder and maker is God: and it remains for us now to view its interior purity and grandeur, that so we may admire it as indeed worthy of a divine construction, and suited to the residing presence of His glorious majesty.

In venturing upon the consideration of so great a subject I am not insensible to the difficulties that belong to its own vast comprehensiveness: but these are less oppressive than those rising out of the *nature of the evidence* which all moral truth requires for its confirmation and defence.

As the subjects of human knowledge are various, there is a corresponding variety in our methods of

intellectual investigation. Mathematical truth, for example, is exhibited by direct demonstration. Physical truth appears in the result of experiments, and becomes difficult of proof in proportion to the extent of its application and the multiplicity of its objects; while moral truth is established by testimony, consciousness, the nature of man, and the laws of mind, which are still more extensive in their bearings.

It is by this last species of evidence that we are to examine the subject of the present discourse. On this account the task is a difficult one, and the success attending the prosecution of it is uncertain and precarious;—not, indeed, because we have slender confidence in the force of an argument that is strictly moral in its character; but simply, because conviction depends chiefly on the state and habit of the mind to which the problem is submitted. For, evidence of this kind does not extort the assent of the understanding, like those rigid claims of demonstration in science or miracles or some accomplished prophecy, to whose authority we are compelled inevitably to yield the immediate and entire homage of our reason. Here hesitation cannot be. The balance of the mind does not even quiver at equilibrium for a moment. No matter whether the decision is agreeable to our wishes, or at variance against them,—submit we must. Here Infidelity hardly stops to cavil, nor has scepticism time "to halt between two opinions."

But, in moral and religious science, this case, alas! is often reversed. The perverted mind may call darkness light and light darkness; and, in expressions of distressing infatuation, it frequently declares that sweet is bitter and that bitter is sweet. We admire the grandeur of a human soul; but cannot help deploring this sad fatuity of its powers. It is melancholy to

think, that a creature who can traverse the ocean, and adapt the winds of heaven to accelerate his movements from sea to sea,—who can measure the stars, survey the globe, and analyse the elements of nature, may yet be, in moral perception, that very "fool who hath said in his heart there is no God."

Nor is evidence *alone* competent to convince him. In every other department of reasoning, additional testimony or proof may impart conviction, when previous attestations have failed. But upon the mind that rejects revelation, just the contrary effect is liable to be produced. This is natural. For, in our anxiety to overcome the rebellious mind, by every argument we urge, we are diffusing a radiance over the object of its displeasure, which of course tends only to awake new feelings of hostility. "It is not for want of strength," says an eloquent writer, "that the ordinary ways of proof are rejected, but for want of sincerity in the mind of those to whom they are proposed; and the same want of sincerity, the same aversion from goodness, will be equally a reason for rejecting any proof whatever. To those who are resolved not to be convinced, all motives, all arguments are equal. He that shuts his eyes against a small glimmering, on purpose to avoid the sight of somewhat that displeases him, would for the same reason shut them also against the sun.*" We cannot therefore, hope by this means to subdue his enmity, or to improve his disposition: nor ought we to feel surprised, if we should innocently offend his eye by bringing into a focus the rays of that sun whose light he hates. Our expectation is from that Divine Spirit, who can so shine upon the heart as to give the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

* Atterbury.

There is, however, one point in which the two kinds of evidence to which we have chiefly referred may be said to agree. Mathematical and moral arguments alike derive their strength from the solution of some foregoing propositions, and these in a similar way from other links in the same mighty chain of consequences, all derived from one primary link, to deny the existence of which is to prove our own absurdity, since it is acknowledged by the consent of every sane mind that an axiom requires no proof at all. The analogy which we are anxious to establish here is obvious to every person of reflection. Some first principle or class of principles must be adopted, to which the parties on the opposite sides of a disputed question will adhere. The first and most essential part of such data is, the existence of God and the relations of intelligent creatures to Him as the fountain of Being. With the man who has excluded the first cause from the government of his own world we have no ambition to contend. Our argument is with the Deist, who acknowledges the divine existence, while he rejects the book that professes to delineate his character and announce his designs.

But why should we take some things for granted in the investigation of our subject? Clearly, because all argumentation à priori requires the assumption of some certain data, else the mind is left quite at sea, the sport of winds and waves, is directed by no pilot, and steers by no chart. We are searching for the indications of a divine mind in the document that professes to be the copy of his own will: some previous notions of his perfections, then, are supposed to have been acquired. Is it not necessary that we should possess some idea of the living being, before it is possible for the eye of reason to discover his resemblance in the picture which is exhibited as his likeness? Can we commence our search for the pearl of great price, quite ignorant of every peculiarity of its lustre, and without any notion of the beauty that distinguishes so precious a gem?

It deserves particular attention, however, that in examining the Scriptures as we would examine any other book with the view of discovering its author, we meet with less powerful difficulties than when the production of a merely human mind is submitted to our inquiry. For, independently of their natural and specific similarity under similar circumstances of cultivation and pursuits, human thoughts are apt to acquire the aspect and complexion of kindred minds. Man therefore, among his fellow men, is not unique enough. He is not sufficiently distinguished in his class to enable us to form a prompt and true opinion as to the particular author of a work which confesses rather the general characteristics of numerous minds, than the specific features of one mental aspect. This kind of difficulty makes it doubtful still who penned the Letters of Junius; and on the same account some have hesitated respecting the author of Waverley*, although it has been ingeniously remarked, on the principle of internal evidence, that his name, omitted indeed on the title page, is nevertheless inscribed on all its other pages. But, in examining the claims of a volume pretending to divine inspiration, it is not surely difficult to trace (if they be there) the indications of a mind whose "thoughts are not our thoughts." The streams of human knowledge may exhibit a strong similarity of appearance, but "the river of the water of life clear as crystal," in what channel soever it winds its course,

* This was written *before* he confessed himself.

and wherever it makes its way, is so unlike the aspect of any other stream, that prejudice itself can hardly mistake its character.

The questions, therefore, are simply these :—Shall we listen to the eloquence of a Bolingbroke when he tells us that this transparent flood gushed from the caverns of deep imposture ? or shall we believe the testimony of an apostle, who declares that he beheld it "proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb ?" From innumerable replies to the important inquiries, we select the following propositions, as adapted to yield the demonstration we require :—

That the mysterious style and character of the Bible correspond to the essential nature of the Being respecting whose perfections it professes to treat.

That the system of moral government which this book exhibits is worthy of infinite wisdom to devise.

That the unity of design and general harmony of the scriptural revelation required the constant superintendence of more than human agency.

That the excellency of those precepts which form and sustain the morality of the gospel furnishes strong indications of the divine authority of the volume that originally contained them.

That the intuitive knowledge which it evidently possesses, viewed in connexion with the majestic form of its appeals, proves the gospel to be an emanation from intelligence that is essentially divine.

That the universality of adaptation, which the religion of the Scriptures has provided, evinces it to be an expedient requiring the unbounded knowledge and goodness of God to suggest it.

I. *The mysterious style and character of the Bible correspond to the essential nature of the Being respecting whose perfections it professes to treat.*

"They," says Lord Bolingbroke, "who pretend to teach divine truths, in allegorical, symbolical, or any mysterious language, deserve to be suspected of imposture." On the contrary, we presume that mystery is an essential character of such a revelation, if it be given in the speech and presented to the comprehension of created beings. It is very natural to suppose, for example, that the more remotely objects are placed from those common things which language was formed to express, the more difficult it must become clearly to describe them.* The unavoidable reference to what is tangible, to sensation, to experience, combining with our notions of a pure and perfect spirit, tend, in our minds, to circumscribe an essence which, on mature thought, we know is necessarily illimitable. Thus the labouring intellect is perplexed. It needs but a momentary reflection to convince us how paradoxical is the language in which we are accustomed to speak of God. Our highest praises of "HIM who inhabiteth eternity" are but lofty epithets appended to human perfections, or sublime negatives prefixed to terms that describe only the absence of human frailties. Nor is the imperfection of language the only cause of our mental embarrassment. A conscious feebleness of thought, to say nothing now of the veil on the mind, in which its eye is often entangled, frequently makes us complain that the subject is not clear.

If therefore, a revelation of a Divine Being is given to man, it is perfectly reasonable to conclude, that a

* President Edwards.

two-fold difficulty must encumber the mind which is anxious to embrace the mighty thought it contains. The first is, the entire want of resemblance between God and any object with which we are familiar, or any idea of which we are conscious. The second difficulty to which we refer, belongs to the nature of that adorable Being, whose self-existent essence places him in a remoteness infinitely beyond, not only the present state of our nature, but above every possible attainment to which even a progress of endless improvement could raise our immortal faculties. Would it not, then, be absurd to expect that a revelation of *such* a Being to creatures such as we are, could, by any possibility, be an easy and a plain one? On the contrary, would not a revelation that professed to bring within the scope of human intellect this glorious being, carry upon the face of it the legible stamp of forgery? It could not be a revelation of Jehovah, whose very name implies that his nature cannot be fully known, except by his own illimitable intelligence, and that his magnitude can be comprehended only, within the all-embracing grasp of an infinite mind.

It may be well here to meet the objector on his own ground. For philosophy, as well as theology, has its mysteries. You analyze an atom, or dissect a fly,—and yet you cannot find out that display of the Almighty to perfection, which belongs to so narrow a compass of inert or organized matter. How then, can you conceive that every thing should be clear in your speculations concerning a divine and glorious Spirit? If the volume of nature requires so much investigation to discover but little of the manifold wisdom of God in the works of creation, can it be reasonably supposed that the disclosures of the divine nature, the

operations of his mind, the schemes of his wisdom, and the principles of his government, which relate to the intelligent universe, "that grand system of spirits," can present no difficulties to the understanding of a mortal? Tell me why natural phænomena should wear a veil, and it will be needless to inform you how it is that divine realities are hidden,—as the sun is hidden, by the obscurity of distance, the stretch of infinitude, and the light that dazzles. "The Lord God is a sun."

When, therefore, the inspired writers speak of those attributes of Deity which are illustrated in the order of his government and history of redemption, their faculties seem strained and oppressed with the greatness of the sentiments they are anxious to express. The justice of God is compared to a lake of fire, his purity to a sea of glass mingled with fire, the breath of his anger is represented as blowing stars from the firmament with the ease with which a mighty wind shakes untimely fruit from the boughs of a fig-tree;—and, as if anxious to give the utmost of what human conception can retain of a munificence that is unbounded, the imagination of one apostle seems to carry him aloft to some distant region, where the great wide sea and the splendid vault of heaven could stretch the entire amplitude of their capacity to his view,—only that he might, by such images of grandeur, be assisted to utter these boundless thoughts:—"I bow my knee to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye may be able to comprehend what is the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of the love of God,—*which* passeth knowledge."—Yes, the sources of eloquence are exhausted; but the mighty subject is *undefined*. Are we then now to be of opinion with Lord Bolingbroke, that "they

who pretend to teach divine truth in allegorical, or symbolical, or any mysterious language, deserve to be suspected of imposture?"—Or, must we risk the charge of enthusiasm, and say, here is God himself condescending to employ the vigour of human intellect and the combinations of human thoughts to describe his own majesty to man; and so conclude with a beautiful writer, "that it is the peculiarity joined to the reality—the adaptation of mysteries to our familiar senses—the union of faith with reason, which make up together (under the view we have taken of the subject) the proof of its divine authority?"*

II. *The system of moral government which this book exhibits is worthy of infinite wisdom to devise.*

Perhaps it may be allowed, with few exceptions, that a revelation from God should regard as one of its chief objects the responsibility of man to a supreme moral governor. Human beings placed in circumstances where no rays of traditionary knowledge of the true God have been transmitted, are regarded by some as capable of sinking into an ignorance equal to that of the brutes that perish. This may be true; but in no region of the globe has there been discovered a natural incapacity, or an inveterate disinclination in our species, to cherish ideas of a supreme and all-pervading spirit, when once such sentiments have been suggested to them. It is not, therefore, without strong reasons that man has been denominated "a naturally religious being." Circumstances and situation in life make all the difference between the initiated and the plebeian mind. The understanding of the one walks unfettered, while that of the other, condemned to the dungeon of ignorance, cannot range the fields of science in company with his fellow man. We must not reproach his blindness merely because he dwells in the dark; for, where the page of knowledge has been unrolled and the true light shines, he lifts his eyes to admire his Maker; and even in the night of pagan gloom, his oppressed and slumbering spirit dreams of this Being. In spite of the veil of the covering, he seeks after him, if haply he might feel after him and find him. Let, then, the proposition, re-published on "Mars Hill," come into contact with even the most barbarous mind, and it will not fail to elicit a notion agreeable to itself. The mental soil needs cultivation; but it retains still those native elements, which, under every clime, will not refuse to cherish "the incorruptible seed."

* Miller's Bampton Lectures.

The conviction that God is, and the idea of human responsibility, existed in the apostle's mind as inseparable thoughts, or he would not have assured the Romans that "the Gentiles which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, shewing the law written on their hearts." Will the natural religion of the Deist, then, constrain the simple acknowledgment that he is accountable to God? We are not going to trouble him now with any questions respecting the precise *rules* of rectitude which he feels willing to recognize; nor will we ask at present whether these laws are contained in the volume of nature, or inscribed on the tablet of the heart; nor *whence* they were promulgated, whether from the mount of God or the throne of reason. We forbear also to perplex him about the *sanctions* of these moral statutes, by stopping the progress of discussion to inquire from the oracle of his conscious bosom, whether they refer to a hell kindled within

him now, or to some torment in a future world. Not again, does it belong to our present design to inquire relative to the *promises* of these enactments, whether they refer to a paradise already opened in the heart, or to some heavenly place hereafter to be known. These things apart,—Let him only concede that he is an *accountable* creature. He will not surely refuse this rational consent;—that the homage of his soul is due to divine authority, although the medium of his government and the procedure of his administration, he may dare to question.

He points to *reason* as at once the test and judge of right, as both the eye and the light of the soul. She is enthroned, empress of the mind, rectifying the balance of judgment, dictating the objects of choice, breathing sweet sincerity over all the passions. Her smiles awake the senses to transport, and the frowns of her displeasure are quite sufficient to inflict the anguish of the heart. This indeed is praise. Oh, why should it not now occur to the vanity that can express it, that while the soul is thus prostrate at the shrine of reason, its devotions are nothing but the payment of idolatrous homage to itself! Awful sacrilege! The crime of robbing heaven! Impious indeed is the affront thus offered to that jealous God, who "will not give his glory to another!"

Again: there are moral phenomena within the observation of every man, which natural religion cannot explain, and for the existence of which it has no cause to assign. The awards of happiness and misery in this life seem unequally distributed. The depraved are usually spared the sorrows that await the amiable and the good. The basest of men are exalted, and the pure in heart have often been the victims of their oppression. "I know not," exclaimed a pagan

philosopher, "how I can call them happy, who, never having received any good as the reward of virtue, have even perished for virtue itself."

Viewed only in the light of nature and philosophy, how gloomy is the face of Providence! how inexplicable the administration of his government, on the principle, either of goodness or severity, of wisdom or power or righteousness! Is that mercy, REASON may well ask, which allows the guilty man to destroy his own peace? And where is justice, if sudden vengeance is withheld when the rights of heaven are invaded? And where is the wisdom that can behold and the omnipotence that suffers, such infinite disorder?

These are questions, my brethren, for which reason has furnished no reply that can meet her own solicitude. Every mouth is stopped, except that one from which proceed these solemn declarations: "He hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness and render to every man according as his works shall be; to them who by patient continuing in well doing, seek for glory, honour, immortality,—*eternal life;* but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and tribulation and anguish. Here the mystery ends—Faith lifts up the veil, admires the harmony of goodness and severity in the countenance of the Parent of the universe,

> "——Asserts eternal Providence,
> And *justifies* the ways of God to man."

Receive the reason which the gospel assigns, and while there is every thing to humble, there is nothing to confound:—reject the evangelical statement, and you find yourself in a world which you cannot assign

to the government of God. "No scheme of rational theism can be supported upon the denial of immortality. To see ages and generations of rationals playing a short-lived part, and then sinking into nothing,—guilty of crimes for which there remains no punishment, exposed to hardships which answer no end, and labouring under misery in the cause of virtue, for which there is laid up no reward:—this would be mere mockery upon man, and surely bespeak neither wisdom nor mercy in God. The apparatus of sun and stars—of rationals and irrationals; the accomplishments of nature, the powers of genius and the moral powers and improvement of man—all rising but to set, and living but to die;—absorbed in endless nothing and mingled with oblivion, were a scene of things unworthy the divine wisdom, and affronting the divine goodness. Better had been none, than such a mock of existence;—at best the bubbles of our hopes, formed with capacities not to be gratified, and anticipating joys never to be accomplished."*

III. We propose to show, in the third place—*That the unity of design and general harmony of the scriptural revelation required the constant superintendence of more than human agency.*

In the consideration of this part of our subject, by the natural order of thought we seem led, first of all, to ascertain the general contents of the book itself and the design for which it was given to the world. We will therefore take a comprehensive view of the information contained in the Bible.

By its *history*, we see the world rising into existence—

* Hunter's Sketch of the Philosophical Character of Lord Bolingbroke, p. 110.

the first man in communion with his Maker—the fact of human degeneracy—an awful deluge clearing the earth of its guilty inhabitants—the sovereignty of God in the preservation of a single family to repeople the globe—the selection of a nation as the special object of the divine care—the birth of Messiah—his crucifixion on Calvary—his miraculous resurrection—the effusion of the Divine Spirit—the commission of Apostles—the wonderful events that transpired under the ministry of these fishermen of Galilee.

By its *predictions*, (those we mean which are yet to be accomplished,) we contemplate the moral renovation of all mankind by the prevalence of divine truth—the destruction of the earth—man rising from his ashes to put on immortality—the heavens rolling together, and the sun veiled in blackness to attend the funeral of the world.

Connected with these events, there is seen a *system of religion*, which, how various soever its administrations may be, is nevertheless, simple in its object and uniform in design. It demands the homage of the heart to One God—describes man as immortal, but guilty and ignorant and helpless,—specifies one method of forgiveness by sacrificial atonement—announces a title to eternal life—and describes the misery of a lost soul.

This is the scheme of religion revealed in the Scriptures both of the Old and the New Testaments. And, to render it more influential and effective, it is brought into contact with the mind of man by examples of piety and forms of worship exhibited and instituted under the power and authority of the great Lawgiver. Hence, the ritual of Moses—the services of the temple—the keeping of sabbaths—preaching the gospel—the rites of baptism and the supper of our

Lord. With different generations, according to his will, he dealt differently. To some, he gave prophets; to some, apostles; to some, evangelists; and to some, pastors and teachers.

Nor is this adaptation more interesting than the *exemplification* of religion and morality in the character of its professors. The justice and purity which the Scriptures inculcate, is so blended with the biography of holy men, that we are forced to feel the example of rectitude while we read its rules. Thus are we constrained to become "followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

This Sacred Volume, then, is a collection of important information respecting man's relation to his Maker in this world and his destination in the life to come. The entire Scriptures have been therefore called "The Statute-book and Record of an everlasting Kingdom." The enactments it records are multifarious in themselves, remote in their dates, and diversified as to the modes of administration; but all subjected to one fountain of authority, whose right it is to constitute, or to abrogate the forms of government according to the sovereignty of his own will. "At sundry times and in divers manners, he spake unto the fathers by the prophets; and in these last days, he hath spoken unto us by his Son." Hence the style of scriptural phraseology is as various as the ages in which it was produced, and versatile as the peculiar genius of every herald who was honoured to proclaim it.

Under the view we have taken of the contents of both the earlier and the later Scriptures, their various parts and dispensations form but *one religion*. They are connected together as a systematic whole, or as different ramifications of one wide-spreading tree, whose vitality circulates through all its veins. It is

the same tree, though ages may have passed away from the time it was planted to the maturity of its growth. It is justly called the same, though grafted; nor did it lose its identity when some of its "branches were broken off."

But it is *that* identity of religion to which we are directed by the *gradual change* of its dispensations on which for a few moments we are anxious to fix your attention. There appears no sudden or abrupt transition from one economy to another. There is no contrast or strong distinction between them. They are analogous and connected; sufficiently characteristic to be distinguished, yet the precise lines of separation are so interwoven that we see not how or where they join; —like the seasons of the year, they succeeded to each other with a progress that rendered man insensible to their succession. Between the appearance of the first and the second Adam, we contemplate a variety of dispensations, as in the covenants made with Noah and Abraham and Moses, together with the ministry of John the Baptist; but they slide with such unnoticed gradations into each other, that the Church, between the morning and the noon of her journey is sensible to the operation of no change.

If more illustration were necessary, we might, in the language of an admirable author, refer to that which may be very intelligibly represented as the *twilight* of the earlier dispensations. "We might observe how the old seems gradually to have been modified, until it might melt into the new; the new to have taken an aspect scarcely its own in the beginning. Witness, on the one hand, the remarkable cessation of idolatry amongst the Jews subsequently to the captivity of Babylon, and the increasing expectation of a future state among them, as the advent

of the great Deliverer drew nearer and nearer: on the other, advert to the Baptist's intermediate ministry, to the palpably miraculous beginnings of Christianity. The appearance of *consistency* prevailing through all these several processes and preparative accommodations, is something far too subtle for any compass of imposture, which could by any possibility have been devised by the first *human* authors of the gospel. If we consider them as the connecting links between a natural dispensation and a spiritual, proceeding from the same divine mind, there is then to be perceived in all an exquisite and most appropriate grace of uniformity."*

IV. We shall endeavour to shew, fourthly,—*That the excellency of those precepts, which form and sustain the morality of the gospel, are strong indications of the divine authority of the volume that originally contained them.*

There is in human nature a disposition to combine systems of religion according to its own fancy, or the model of its own wishes. Having forsaken the true path of obedience, the restless spirit is ever going about to establish its own righteousness, not submitting itself to the righteousness of God. Intent upon the prosecution of this design, it is ready to collect materials from any quarter, if they seem adapted either to the construction or the ornament of the system it has resolved to exhibit. This remark is applicable,

* In addition to Miller's Bampton Lectures, from which this passage is taken, the author with great pleasure refers to a sermon, entitled "A Review of the Divine Dispensations, the Triumph of the Church;" by Richard Winter Hamilton of Leeds: a production which, for transparent thought and vigour of eloquence, is above all praise.

not more to pagan moralists and deistical philosophers, than to a class of religionists who profess attachment to Christ, while they accept *partially* the doctrines he taught. They acknowledge the hope of his resurrection, but disown the atonement of his death: and, having disrobed him of divine honours, seem pleased to admire his character as the most sublime form of virtue, and the loveliest specimen of what innocent humanity is, and what, in their opinion, even degenerate nature may easily become.

Now we are not unwilling to concede that, by this industry an interesting and attractive exterior of moral excellence may be displayed. But, amidst the many theories of virtue that have been and that are now presented to the world, do you perceive in any one of them, precepts and doctrines so pure so elevated and so refined, as those by which the man of God (in the scriptural sense of that phrase) is thoroughly furnished unto every good work? Can you discern the working of a nobler vitality than that which, by a wonderful process of moral accumulation, is daily adding to faith virtue, and to virtue temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity?" Is there a more efficient remedy for the trials of life, a more powerful opiate against the dread of an hereafter, than that system of grace which provides a solace for present anxiety and affords the blessed hope that the spirit of man, weary of inferior joys, and having toiled in this vale of tears till the evening of his day, shall rest at length in the embraces of infinite love?

Again:—We could not fail to confess ourselves greatly deficient in generous feeling, if we refused to appreciate, or seemed disposed to undervalue the kind offices and amiable dispositions of many persons

who do not allow that authority to revelation with which we are so ready to invest it. We are bound to admire the appearance of goodness wherever we observe it;—to think with pleasure of whatsoever things are lovely or of good report:—but we can form no notion of any genuine morality detached from the truths of the Bible. The men who form such a character as we have acknowledged *have* the gospel. They may not like its purity, but its wisdom they cannot resist. Its precepts are interwoven with their thoughts and blended with the elements of all their sentiments; while yet they may not be aware that the stream of knowledge at which they drink with so much pleasure springs from the fountain which they have learnt to despise.

We have purposely avoided all minute and lengthened detail of those specific virtues which the laws of Christianity inculcate; because, we did not design to put the evangelical system of morals into comparison with any human scheme of virtue. We are anxious to settle any dispute between us and the adversaries of Christianity in this more compendious way; *First*, do not the Scriptures exhibit a form of moral excellence without any defect? *Secondly*, does it not deserve the consideration of every unprejudiced mind, whether other theories which come nearest to the morality of the gospel do not in fact, owe every degree of that approximation to its own attractions? Are they not dim or bright, according to the distance or proximity in which they stand related to the luminous centre of divine revelation? What display of morality a system might make entirely removed from the reach of this influence, "eye hath not seen, ear has not heard." But, *thirdly*, if that amiability and integrity of mind, which are the boast and glory of many who reject the

gospel, can make out a claim to the title of real goodness and benevolence, let it be done. What proof of benevolence has infidelity given to the world? Whose understanding has it enlarged? What health of body or peace of mind has it imparted? Has it corrected the passions or purified the heart of any who have drunk the most deeply into its spirit? And what advantages has the public reaped by its propagation? Where shall we trace the footsteps of its mercy toward the place where want and sorrow dwell? What refuge has it opened for the homeless and the destitute? Look around, my brethren, and behold the general desolation; try to estimate the sum of the world's misery as you listen to the whole creation "that groaneth and travaileth together in pain until now." Surveying, as from another Olivet, this scene of woe, Christian, *you* may weep; but the heart of infidelity never was touched with such generous grief; nor was her sympathy ever known to have a tear to spare for "this world in ruins." No, it is the religion of the Bible alone that says to man, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

V. *The intuitive knowledge which it evidently possesses, viewed in connexion with the majestic forms of its appeals, proves the gospel to be an emanation from intelligence, essentially divine.*

These are attributes with which all will surely agree to invest a religion that is worthy of God. It is natural to expect, that it should be free from human imperfections,—that it should assume the aspect of transparent purity and carry the air of a noble magnificence of character. This, it will be readily admitted, we presume, is the sort of character which must be regarded as one of the essential excellencies of

such a revelation. We have, then, only to see whether, in point of *fact*, such perfections are apparent in the book which professes to be divine. With such sentiments in mind we stated our fifth proposition, which we will now proceed to establish and exemplify.

The *Founder* of this system always claimed and evinced perfect supremacy of character. With a tone and style of expression indicative of conscious independence, he raised his eye to Pilate, and confounded the imperial authority of Cæsar, "Thou couldst have no power at all against *me*, except it were given thee from above." With a fearlessness corresponding to absolute dignity, he rebukes the Sanhedrim. Throwing upon the mask of their hypocrisy the full frown of his look, he utters this awful charge: "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how shall ye escape the damnation of hell!" It is true, he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; but the lines which solicitude had drawn and the furrows which sorrow had made in his countenance, obscured not the glory that ever sat upon that brow. The eye of infinite majesty beamed through the tears of grief, when he exclaimed, "No man taketh away my life, but I lay it down of myself: I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." From the storms of life he calmly retired to the refuge of a grave. Thence, after three days, he rose from the dead, announced himself a King now commencing a march from the tomb of Joseph, which should terminate only at the throne of universal and endless dominion. His proclamations are accordingly issued, his ensigns invite every one to join a power appointed to destroy wickedness and to conquer death in every province of the globe.

What were the weapons of his warfare? Did he,

like the Impostor of Mecca, court human authority; and, like him, having grasped the sceptre and the weapons of state, was it his practice to propose only a choice of two evils, the Koran or the sword, conversion or death? The King of Zion had a sword indeed which he bathed, not in blood, but tears;—and they did not stain its brightness. "It came out of his mouth," says the apostle,—its sharp two edges are prepared for the day of vengeance, or the year of his redeemed. Its force is truth—the wound it inflicts is conviction—it pierces nothing but the conscience—its victory is the homage of the heart—it subdues without enslaving—it conquers, but does not destroy.

With such armour the first Evangelists, having received their commission from on high, went forth to demand the homage of all nations to a master that was crucified. They were poor, illiterate, despised, and timid. With no other weapons than those of arguments and facts and persuasions and intreaties and tears, they contended against the might of greatness, the customs of ages, the craft of cabinets, the edicts of monarchs;—and the Galileans conquered!

If you suspect that I am trespassing on a province not assigned to the discussion of the internal evidences of this great subject, forgive me. I will presently return to the circle whose margin I may have transgressed. But before I do so, give me leave to ask you, on whom falls the heavier charge of fanaticism now?—on me, who ascribe these effects to the agency of a divine mind attending the demonstration of his own truth, or on my opponents, whose reason is not revolted in referring such effects to the unassisted weakness of the fishermen of Galilee? Nothing, surely, can be so *credulous* as infidelity!

But we must return to take another view of the

elevated character of christianity, evinced in the manner of its appeals to the heart and conscience of man. We refer particularly to the scriptural representations of human nature. There man is exhibited to himself as a delinquent condemned and wretched. His moral aspect wears the indications of constant solicitude; and a dark foreboding hangs upon his spirit. His moral history is but a long catalogue of crimes, or a dreadful detail of misery. But is not this the picture of fallen humanity under every clime, and has it not been a true representation of man in every age? Hold it in a true light, and let reason and conscience decide whether it is a genuine or a distorted image of man. The lineaments are familiar to our own experience; and in acknowledging the resemblance, we are convinced that it is the sketch of a master hand; the production of a mind that "needed not that any should teach him, for he knew what was in man."

The affecting part of the subject before us then is this:—*we* ourselves are the persons to whom this representation refers—*we* are described as from our own diary. This singular book, written at sundry times and in distant ages, is the chronicle of our individual nature. It must therefore be the offspring of divine intelligence: it has surely proceeded from the notice of an eye that has watched my movements in the retrospect and in the prospect also of my history. Now, it says what I *know* was; and now it predicts the destiny which my conscience at this moment makes me dread. "What *man* knoweth the spirit of man that is *in him?*" But here is the analysis of the secret heart; the record of a hidden life! From the stranger, therefore, that sat at the well and traced the history of a sinner, it was impossible to withhold the acknowledgment, that he was a Prophet. Such demonstration cannot

be resisted, and the conviction rising from it cannot be suppressed, "Come, see a man that told me all things that ever I did,—*is not this the Christ?*"

VI. Next to the peculiarity noticed, in what have been called the intuition of the gospel, and the majestic form of its appeals, we are conducted naturally to a kindred thought contained in the last proposition of the series presented to your notice at the commencement of this discussion, and which is now to be more particularly submitted to your reflection. It is,

That the universality of adaptation which the religion of the gospel has furnished, clearly evinces it to be an expedient requiring the unbounded knowledge and goodness of a Divine Being for its author.

"Though an unbeliever," says one of the finest of uninspired writers,* "may by experience perceive that the enjoyments of this world are uncertain and unsatisfactory, yet he can hardly think any thing else of much consequence to him. But, if he ever becomes a convert to Christianity, how is he surprised to see, by the light of this faith, himself and every thing about him appear so very different from what they did before! He is amazed to see how the things of this world have been tinselled for the vain, gilded for the covetous, and aggrandized for the ambitious; and more amazed still, when he perceives into what a despicable meanness they are sunk again by that prospect of immortality and eternal life which true faith sets before him. This sweetens and sanctifies correction; this gives calm within when all is tempest without; this makes daylight in the mind when there is night

* Rev. Philip Skelton.

only in the world, confusion in the pursuits of men, and mystery in the schemes of providence; this clearly shows us our path—or, safely leads by the hand through that we cannot see. When the nature of God's works, the drifts of his providence, or the depths of his religion, become unfathomable to the scanty line of our reason, this 'evidence of things not seen,' lays the soul to rest on a downy resignation, in the fortress of a comfortable trust, that all is right, or will be well."

Does the religion of the Bible deserve such praise? We will examine this question by reference to individual experience; the testimony of accredited witnesses of the influence of the gospel on others; and the presumed necessity of man in the remote futurity of his being.

1. Let individual experience bear witness here. The man who communes with his own heart will soon find within himself the elements of that evil thing, whose melancholy influence is every day wasting the world and threatening to make it desolate. His heart moves in sympathy with the mourners that go about the streets, but he knows not how to account for the misery whose root of bitterness has struck into his own heart. The voice of nature and of reason are silent on this fearful subject. They say not *why* man should die, although they often awake the fear that he *may* survive his funeral. In the moment of his deep solicitude, this language arrests his attention,—"By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Conscious from this moment that *he* is a son of that degenerate parent, his heart is distracted. Needing something to relieve him from the pressure of a care that sinks his spirit, he urges the mournful cry, "What shall I do to be saved?" Invited by the

messenger of glad tidings, he comes before the cross, listens to the successive tones of sorrow,—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—and of reason,—"He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." He accepts the remedy; and the wounded spirit, refreshed and comforted, is of good cheer, as one whose sins are forgiven him. Having thus tasted mercy at its fountain, as a pilgrim to another world, he hastens on his way rejoicing; nor does he faint in his journey. For, the stream from that source he finds still adapted to his refreshment. It is unremitting as the return of his wants, and ample as his desires for happiness. The rock of which he drinks follows him, and "that rock is Christ."

Now, we are willing to admit, that this argument is more confirmatory of the christian's faith, than convincing to the unbelieving mind. But then, is it unreasonable that the deliberate and solemn statements of the experimental man should be heard by the infidel with as much attention as that of the unbeliever, who has never brought this subject to the test of his own experience? If the pious man tells us simply, that prior to his acquaintance with the gospel he was unhappy, and that he elsewhere sought in vain for a remedy to remove his conscious wretchedness;—if now he says, that in *consequence* of yielding up his heart to the gospel, he feels "joy and peace in believing;"—if under the influence of its principles he assures us, that he is contented with the arrangements of providence in this world, while he longs to enjoy the presence of the Father of his spirit in a world to come;—if this hope within him gives calmness to his temper, and makes him in the sight of all men, meek and prudent and

charitable and honest;—if, moreover, all this time, he is neither a fool, nor a hypocrite, nor an enthusiast—*then,* his testimony and professions demand the attention that is due to a reasonable man. Hence, did it not become the unbeliever, before he rejected the gospel, to have performed one of these difficult tasks,—either to have proved the doctrines themselves untrue, or to have shewn the infatuation of his fellow-creature, (perhaps indeed his bosom-friend,) who tells him, that they are the joy of his heart; or to have provided for him some better system, some other principles, that will give comfort in life, and sustain him in the prospect of a dying hour? Till you can promise this, if even Christianity be only a solemn delusion, it is cruel to disturb his composure. Tear him from the rock to which he clings, and he rests *no more;* but,

> ———" Like the ocean weed up-torn,
> And loose, along the world of waters borne,
> Is cast companionless from wave to wave
> On life's rough sea;—and there is *none to save.*"

2. Next to the account of individual experience, let us receive the testimony of accredited witnesses, who have observed the effects of the gospel on the minds of their fellow-men.

The Apostle Paul had tried it from Jerusalem round about to Illyricum, where he had fully preached the gospel of Christ; and the growth of purity and wisdom and happiness, caused him to acknowledge himself debtor to the bond and the free.

Subsequent evangelists have tried it; and from the plebeian's hut to the palace of the Cæsars, it was the power of God unto salvation.

Reformers of corrupted christianity have tried it; and they have assured us, that that which changed the

Roman world from paganism to christianity, overcame the violence, even of religious persecution.

Christian missions have tried it in all lands; and from the savage of the wood to the halls of science, there has not yet been discovered a diversity, either of mental character, or natural disposition; either of accidental state, or fixed habit, to which it is not adapted.

3. Presuming upon the necessities of future generations, the gospel is a prospective blessing, and its influence will be continuous. If analogy does not clearly give this persuasion,—if it is not *fair* to consider in this case, that the chronicle of the past is the prediction of what shall be, the light of Divine Prophecy shows us in remote futurity, this river of life moving on, towards the most distant ages. Behold! its flood swells, the embankments that confined its current give way; it spreads, it "covers the earth as the waters cover the sea."

Are these statements allowed?—Then, we are led to such conclusions as the following: first, that this provision has been devised, by a knowledge of man in all the possibilities of his life, and under every date of his history, that it was prepared for him, antecedent to his wants, and prospective of all he needed, to the last evening of his life; and then, secondly, that such knowledge and intuition of mind, belongs exclusively to a Being who is infinitely wise and good.

We are quite aware of having pursued a train of argument which may be regarded with very unequal, perhaps indeed, with completely opposite degrees of respect. Those mysteries, for example, which are the objects of contempt to the infidel, impress the mind of the believer with silent reverence before the Divine Majesty. All other doctrines may be distaste-

ful and repulsive to one mind, and yet, in the estimation of another, they may be the very element of life. These contrasts of disposition toward the same object must be referred to some cause.

Is it to be traced, think you, to any frailty of intellect, which marks the christian advocate's distinction from an acknowledged superiority of mind ever shewing itself in the character and actions of the disbeliever? We think that it is not *there* to be found. The defenders of revelation can think and reason as clearly as other men. The minds of Paschal and Bacon, of Boyle and Locke and Newton, were surely never oppressed by any labour of scientific investigation; nor did they even once feel it difficult to unravel the many webs which sophistry had woven to perplex them. It has never been supposed by the friends of christianity, nor has the scorner any ground that will sustain his insinuation, that scriptural theology disclaims all friendliness with general science, or forbids any intercourse with true philosophy. In the view of those noble minds, the tree of knowledge and the tree of life possessed no rival charms. These mighty spirits could not submit to remain the vassals of unproved opinion; but resolving to be free, shook off the long-worn fetters of prepossessions and of prejudice; and finding their souls at liberty, they went whither they pleased in quest of knowledge and of God. They have given us the result of their experience. They have returned to tell us, that in the field of science they sought him, but "found him in his temple." On such authority we may safely conclude, that, as the religion of the Bible does not, on the one hand, identify itself with ignorance and superstition; neither, on the other hand, can it be either the cause or the consequence of any pitiable imbecility thought to be inseparable

from the character of its professors. No:—infidelity is a thing of the heart, fastening itself, not so much on the strength as to the pride of intellect.

In justification of the above remark, we may recollect the very unfair, and even wicked manner in which persons of infidel habits come to the perusal of sacred scripture. To a human author, they are not unwilling to withhold the tribute of due respect, by granting, that the declared *intention* of his book should be adopted as the just principle of its interpretation. But they reflect unspeakable dishonour on their boasted rationality, by refusing to examine the pages professing to reveal the wisdom of God, by the *designs He has declared* in presenting his will to man. The individual who sits down to read the production of his fellow creature with the intention of finding something in the book which its author never contemplated, betrays a folly which requires no refutation. But, it should never be forgotten, that that conduct which is mere absurdity in the man who might be supposed to read a treatise on moral science to understand geometry, or Milton's "Paradise Lost," in order that he might know what the poet *proved*, becomes an impious affront in him who studies the word of God with any other views than those which Divine Wisdom has himself announced:—who did not propose to countenance the vices, nor to gratify the curiosity, nor to pamper the corruptions of man; but who sent his word to teach him, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, he should live soberly and righteously and godly in the present evil world." *This* was the end proposed by the author of the Bible. Has the book justified its professions? Are civil concord and peace at home, and joy and contentment and hope and charity within the conscious breast, the natural offspring of its

influence? Has infidelity invested its genuine admirers with such an harmonious and delightful variety of moral virtues, as that which is beheld in the man whose daily life exhibits to all around him, "whatsoever things are true and honest and pure and lovely, and of good report?" Then, its name shall be sacred in the memory of all generations till time shall be no more;—but, if the opposite of these excellencies be the uniform and inevitable result of its operations on the human mind—if, in fact, such is the moral character of its apostles and disciples, that an appeal to their flagrant lives is the strongest refutation of their principles;—then, let the world execrate the day of its nativity, while the church retires to weep, that still the monster has a being.

LECTURE IX.

THE PRACTICAL INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY, AN EVIDENCE OF ITS DIVINITY.

By ROBERT PHILIP.

LECTURE IX.

THE PRACTICAL INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY, AN EVIDENCE OF ITS DIVINITY.

MATT. vii. 15---20.

Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

THE practical influence of Christianity is an evidence of its divine origin, level to every capacity, and open to general observation. Genius is not requisite in order to apprehend it, nor learning essential to its comprehension: but whoever can distinguish between "good and evil, right and wrong," is a competent judge of this species of proof, because it appeals directly to the common sense of mankind; for, like the *fixed* stars, the fruits of christianity are as visible to the naked eye of the illiterate, as to the aided eye of the philosopher.

In order to appreciate the evidence furnished by miracles and prophecy, some considerable acquaintance with the facts and principles of history is requisite; because, in this department of proof, the judgment cannot go beyond the memory, nor, in *this* country, derive much assistance from actual observation. There is no *supernatural* aspect about British scenery; and, therefore, no appeal to the *senses* in favour of revelation, as in the EAST. The dens of Babylon do not yawn, nor the pools of Nineveh mantle, nor the

ruins of Jerusalem frown, nor the rocks of Horeb and Sinai rear their miracle-starred fronts, within the sphere of *our* sensible observation. Britain was never the seat of prophecy, nor the scene of miracles. The rod of Moses did not reach to it: its air was never fanned by the wing, nor its soil pressed by the foot of an angel: God never descended upon its mountains in visible majesty, nor ever irradiated its wildernesses with the glory of the Sheckinah. But, if the EAST possess all the *material* vouchers of a divine revelation, this "Island of the Sea" presents the *moral* vouchers of it, in rich and ripe abundance. For, after embodying — even after emblazoning all the faults and defects of our individual and national character, enough of "good fruit" will remain to prove that christianity is a "good tree" of God's right-hand planting. No other tree has produced moral fruit of the same quality, or in the same quantity. And, then, those practical effects of christianity fall under the notice of all men, as clearly as the "twelve manner of fruits" on the tree of life appeared to JOHN in the apocalyptic vision of Paradise. Like him, we can count their number, calculate their seasons, and prove that they are "for the healing of the nations."

The practical influence of christianity, as proof of its divine origin, has likewise an advantage over the INTERNAL and EXPERIMENTAL evidences. Not that it is more conclusive; but that it is more obvious, and requires less of tact or talent to comprehend it. The effect of internal evidence on the mind depends greatly upon the degree of our discernment and discrimination. The general character of God must be understood, before the mind can judge of the harmony between that *general* character, and the

particular doctrines of christianity. In like manner, without some familiarity with the genius, times and style of the prophets and apostles, it is impossible to trace out their personal identity, or their relative consistency, as WRITERS. And, as to EXPERIMENTAL evidence, it can have no weight apart from the *consciousness* of the individual it appeals to: for, if he have *felt* nothing of the power of divine truth on his own mind, the feelings of others must be unintelligible to him. But practical evidence is self-evident to minds of all orders, and to characters of every description; for the most weak and the most wicked can discern between good and evil—between the useful and the injurious, in human conduct; and, therefore, all *sane* minds are capable of judging of the tree of christianity by its *fruits*.

Under the impression of these facts, I propose to embody the practical character of christianity, as it appears in the New Testament, — and the actual results of its practical influence on the world, as they appear in authentic history and real life.

I.

Let the practical character of Christianity be drawn from the Christian Scriptures.

This is not an unreasonable request. It cannot, indeed, even seem so to an INFIDEL: for, if he think that the character and tendency of deism have been caricatured by all its enemies, and betrayed by some of its friends; if he appeal from popular clamour to the deliberate MANIFESTO, addressed to *Warburton* by the English deists; if he disclaim the ribaldry of *Paine*, and the ravings of *Taylor*, and cry, *shame!* on all who identify these extravagancies with natural

religion; — he cannot, consistently, refuse to judge of christianity from its own oracles, nor to distinguish between their representations of it, and those of its imprudent friends. Let, therefore, the deist "do as he would be done by," in this argument, and I require no more.

I. *Does Christianity, as it appears in the New Testament, inculcate, sanction, or connive at any vice or impropriety of conduct?*

Now there could hardly be a better proof that it does not, than the simple fact, that this question seems almost impious and insulting to all who bear the christian name. Whether real or nominal christians, they feel instinctively shocked by the bare insinuation of vicious tendency against their system. Whatever is wrong in their own character, they declare to be at variance with the character of christianity. Were it, therefore, the fact, (which it is not,) that the New Testament contained some wrong maxims, it would be the fact also, that they are so few, and so neutralized by the mighty mass of its moral precepts, as to be *unnoticed* or *unfelt* by the public. Infidels alone pretend to find immoral maxims in "the truth as it is in Jesus." But what have they found that wears this aspect?

First, The declaration of Christ, *that he came not to send peace on the earth, but a sword; and to kindle a fire on the earth.* This, it is said, is the distinct avowal of hostile and destructive purposes. But, however plausible this inference may appear, the sober and certain *fact* is, that Christ did not allow his servants to fight for himself, nor for his kingdom; but promptly and solemnly reproved and repressed every manifestation of a spirit which would have

employed fire or sword in his cause. It is, therefore, self-evident that both the fire and the sword which he sent upon the earth, were the *moral* hostility and power of his religion, against all irreligion and false religions. And, if DEISM were the *true* religion, and its champions as zealous to spread it, as Christ and his apostles were in spreading christianity, deism would inevitably send, at least, a similar sword, and kindle a similar fire, on the earth: for TRUTH must ever be a two-edged sword and a consuming fire against error and crime. It is, therefore, the glory of christianity, that whilst it disclaims and denounces the use of all *material* force against its enemies and rivals, it marshals and leads on against them all the *moral* force of truth and eternity.

Second, *It is said, that Christianity inculcates division and dissension in families.* This charge is founded on Christ's declaration, that he came "to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother." But, if this be a valid objection against the practical design of christianity, it is equally strong against the deism which starts it. This is the very condition of the deist in his own family. His natural religion "sets him at variance" with his father and mother, with his wife and sisters; so far as religion is concerned. They dislike his theories, and he despises their creed. And such *variance* is inevitable in all families whenever their opinions are thus opposite as the poles. The infidel, if he is attached to his system, finds, as much as the primitive christian did, that "a man's foes are those of his own household," whenever they oppose themselves to his sentiments. Why then should he parade against christianity an objection which he, above all men, knows and feels to press against

natural religion with equal force? His family dread or abhor his infidelity, and he scorns or hates their christianity. Now this was precisely the state of domestic feeling in heathen and Jewish families, whenever a son or a daughter became a christian: the parents and children were inevitably at variance. Not that christian children were taught or allowed to quarrel with their heathen or Jewish parents, or even to treat them harshly; they were bound by every solemn consideration to *win* them unto Christ; but they could no more be of "*one mind*" with them until they were won, than HUME could be of one mind with his mother, or a modern deist with his family. The real question, therefore, in regard to the variance occasioned in families by christianity, is, did Christ plant any root of bitterness in *christian* families? If not, (and he certainly did not,) then the variance created by his doctrines, was only such as any doctrines would produce, when one part of the family embraced, and the other rejected them: with this difference, however, that the *believing* members of a household are bound to conduct themselves with meekness, kindness, and love, towards the *unbelieving* members.

THIRD—*It is said, that Christianity violates natural affection, by claiming too much love to Christ.* This charge is founded on Christ's declaration, that "whosoever loveth father or mother, wife or children, more than him, is not worthy of him." But however this objection may weigh against UNITARIANISM, it has no weight whatever against christianity; for, according to that, the FATHER and the SON are *one* in essence and dignity; and, therefore, if Christ had claimed for himself even *more* love than our parents and relations have a right to, his demand would not have

been unreasonable or unjust; because we are under greater obligations to him, both as God and as man, than we are, or can be, even to our parents. This is the will of God, "that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father." Now if it would be criminal to love our Heavenly Father *less* than our earthly parents, it must be equally so to love them *more* than the SON, seeing he and the Father are one. Besides, the deist, if he really love deism, must love it *more* than father and mother: for, as in general he must grieve or offend them by his infidelity, it is, of course, dearer to him than their peace or approbation. It is, therefore, with an ill grace that deists attempt to fasten on christianity the charge of dividing families, or of distracting society; for their own system, and any system, would just have the same effect whenever it came into collision or contact with opposite opinions and old partialities.

FOURTH—*It is said that Christianity inculcates* IMPROVIDENCE and PRESUMPTION. This charge is founded on Christ's injunction, "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for the body, what ye shall put on; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." But that thoughtless indifference, far less idleness, is not meant by the injunction, "take no thought," is self-evident, not only from the whole tenor of christianity, but also from the whole train of Christ's reasoning on this occasion. He appealed to the fowls of the air, and to the lilies of the field, as illustrations of his meaning; and though the fowls do not sow, nor the lilies toil, both are *active* according to their several abilities. The birds are industrious in searching for food, and the lily sends its roots abroad in the ground, and opens its chalice to the sun and the dew. It is,

therefore, undue care, or distracting anxiety, and not industry, which is forbidden: and surely there is need to impose a check upon that fretting care which embitters life, and banishes eternal things from the mind.

FIFTH—*It is said that Christianity inculcates a timid, passive, and abject spirit.* This charge is founded upon Christ's injunction not to render evil for evil, nor to resent injuries. But who does not see at a glance, that if *retaliation* were to become universal, society could not subsist? BAYLE has said, that a state composed of *real* christians could not subsist, because of its pacific spirit. But well might *Montesquieu* ask, "why not? Citizens of this description would have a clear knowledge of their several duties, and a great zeal to perform them: they would have a just notion of the right of natural defence; and the more they thought they owed to religion, the more sensible they would be of what they owed to their country. The principles of christianity deeply engraven upon the heart, would be infinitely more powerful than the false honour of monarchies, the human virtues of republics, or the servile fear of despotic states." This was the deliberate judgment of Montesquieu on the subject. And one thing may be added to it, which deserves the attention of all deists;—that they owe their own *safety* to the pacific spirit of christianity; for, did it inculcate retaliation, they would inevitably be the first victims of its vengeance, because they are its only avowed enemies. They actually owe their lives to the lenity and long-suffering of christianity: and, as they must be aware that society itself could not exist without the general exercise of mutual forbearance, it is "passing strange" that they should cavil at the very palladium of their own life, and of national safety!

II. *Is there any personal or relative virtue which Christianity does not inculcate and enforce?* This question, like the former, excites surprise in the mind of all christians; because the impression left on their minds by the Scriptures is, that whatsoever things are good, or of good report, are all best defined and enforced by christianity. It is, however, true, that christianity does not inculcate PATRIOTISM; and this fact is turned into an objection against its practical character. Let us examine it. Patriotism is the love of our country. But, as one well asks, "*What love?* The *bigoted* love cherished by the Jews, which led them to abominate every other nation as accursed, and to refuse to render them even the slightest good office? The *proud* love displayed by the Greeks, which despised the rest of mankind as ignorant barbarians? The *selfish* love that predominated among the Romans, and stimulated them to enslave the world? The *fiery* love that, in modern times, would sacrifice kingdoms to the false glory of country? No! Of this spirit christianity knows nothing." HORNE might have added, this was the very spirit of all the patriotism which existed in the time of Christ; and as it needed no stimulant, and deserved no sanction from religion, he taught the consanguinity of all mankind. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" is the patriotism of christianity; and its country is the world. The proverbial patriotism of antiquity was merely provincial, and, like a river, flowed only in *one* direction, and fertilized only the country in which it arose; whereas, like the meridian sun, the patriotism of christianity sheds its light and warmth in *all* directions.

III. *Is there any doctrine of Christianity which sanctions vice, or has an immoral tendency?*—Now,

that some of the doctrines of the gospel are perverted to base purposes, and abused by some men, cannot be denied, and ought not to be concealed. It is therefore frankly and fully conceded to the deist, that there is even a SECT of men (not, indeed, by *association*, but by sentiment) who hold themselves emancipated from the duties of the law, by the doctrines of the gospel; and at liberty to sin, because grace abounds. But christianity cannot justly be held responsible for such characters, seeing she brands them with infamy, and affirms that their damnation is as sure as it is just. Thus all unrighteousness of men who "hold the truth in unrighteousness," is disclaimed and denounced by all the christian oracles: their universal and unvarying maxim being, that without HOLINESS no man shall see the Lord. And no *individual doctrine* of the gospel, in its letter or spirit, militates in the least against this maxim. Indeed, all the doctrines of grace confirm and illustrate it; and are, like itself, "according to godliness," as they exist in the New Testament.

Even the doctrine of ELECTION is practical in its design: for its express object is conformity to the moral image of Christ; and, therefore, wherever it has not a holy influence, its design is perverted or misunderstood. In itself, however, it involves the absolute necessity of good works and of good dispositions; for believers are "*ordained*" to walk in good works, and, as the elect of God, bound to cultivate all the graces of the spirit. Christianity warrants no man to regard himself as predestinated to eternal life, apart from all conformity to the image of the Son of God.

The doctrine of EFFECTUAL CALLING, also, is practical in its design: for believers are called with "a *holy* calling;" to be holy in all manner of conversation and godliness. Whenever, therefore, any one walks

unworthy of his high vocation, his inconsistencies are not the practical effects of his calling, but the natural effects of forgetting that he is bound to be holy, even as the God who called him is holy.

The doctrine of JUSTIFICATION, by FAITH without the deeds of the law, is also practical in its design: for believers are justified by faith, that the righteousness of the law may be fulfilled in them, and the law itself established by the fruits of their faith. Thus, while justification before God is, in no sense or degree, *by* good works; it is, in every sense and to the utmost degree, in *order* to good works, and for practical purposes: for the grace of God that bringeth salvation, brings it teaching us, at the same time, that denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the world; and to live thus, "looking for the glorious appearing of the great God, even our Saviour, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and render us a peculiar people in our zeal for good works."

The doctrine of the FINAL PERSEVERANCE of all true believers is practical in its design: for, if they are kept by the power of God unto salvation, they are kept through FAITH;—that is, kept believing all saving and sanctifying truth; and thus kept under its practical influence in proportion to the strength of their faith. Besides, it is the perseverance of believers "as saints," not as *sinners*, that the gospel teaches and guarantees: for christianity disclaims and denounces the *unholy*, as much as the *unbelieving*.

The doctrine of the necessity of DIVINE INFLUENCE is practical in its design: for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness and truth: is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness and temperance.

II.

Let the actual results of the Practical Influence of Christianity on the world, be drawn from authentic history and impartial observation of real life.

The limits of a sermon cannot, of course, embrace all the facts which these sources would furnish: I must, therefore, rather characterize than trace the moral history of christendom.

Now, whatever christianity may be in theory, (even if it were an imperfect system), it has produced a moral reformation and created a moral taste throughout Europe, unparalleled in the annals of the world. Even in GREECE, where the good tree of christianity, like the sacred tree of liberty, has been withering for ages under the blasting coruscations of the Moslem crescent; such is its moral influence still, that even her own PLATO and LYCURGUS, were they to re-appear at this crisis of her fate, durst not sanction *infanticide* or *slavery*. SOCRATES would be held impure, and ARISTIDES unjust. Yes, notwithstanding all the corruptions of christianity in Greece, and weakened as its partial influence is by Turkish counteractions, the brightest stars of her heathen olympiads would be regarded as "wandering stars," to whom the blackness of darkness is reserved for ever, were they to shine out again in all the *unholy* fires of their former character.

Even in ROME, where the good tree of christianity is cramped and crushed by all the *parasite* plants of idolatrous superstition, neither the gravity of her SENECA, nor the eloquence of her CICERO, could gain popular suffrage to the doctrine of suicide, or the custom of slavery. And in this country, both the philosophers and the gods of the best periods of

Grecian or Roman heathenism, would excite as much *disgust* as curiosity; and in general be reckoned, by any British jury, too bad even for *transportation*.

In Rome itself, no small portion of this moral feeling exists; for, although the popish Capitol presents as unfavourable a specimen of practical and doctrinal christianity as any enemy of christianity could wish to see; and corruption enough to satiate the voracity of a Shaftsbury or a Voltaire; still, even in Rome, there is a moral atmosphere in which the spirit and manners of the pagan Capitol could not be revived. Many of the popular vices of the ancient Romans could not have co-existed with the popery of the *dark ages*. Even then, a *Caligula* durst not have fed his lions with human flesh, nor a *Titus* celebrated his father's birth-day by feasting wild beasts with living Jews. A *Claudius* durst not have glutted the lakes with dying gladiators, and could not have found a *Tacitus* to designate the carnage as a *grand* spectacle. The Floral Games would not have found votaries even during the Carnival, nor the Twelve Tables found a place in the Vatican, except in the archives of its antiquities. And if these enormities could not have co-existed with the christianity of the dark ages, much less could they be combined with the present christianity of Rome, notwithstanding all its corruptions. For, although both the form and spirit of popery be a *libel* on the christianity of the New Testament; there are so many fragments of TRUTH in its frame, that many vices are kept in check, and not a few of the social virtues kept popular by it. But this is taking lower ground than is necessary: it proves, however, that the very *worst* forms of christianity have more practical influence than the very best forms of heathenism had. But let us review,

1. *The practical influence of primitive Christianity, whilst it was taught by the Apostles and Evangelists.*

Now, upon its moral triumphs, even in that short period, we are not afraid to stake the question of its truth: and this is a concession which a reflecting deist ought to appreciate; for, if christianity was then ITSELF in all things, the public mind and manners were then as *impure* as error and idolatry could render them. Nor was this general profligacy—like that which followed the Restoration in Britain—a sudden revulsion from austerity to extreme licentiousness; but it was the settled habit of the Roman empire, and had been the very element of mankind for ages. Nor was there any thing in any religion of the time operating as a check upon that profligacy: for Judaism had almost lost its moral influence even in Jerusalem; and heathenism actually ministered to all the worst passions of human nature, when christianity began to assail them. Whatever, therefore, it met with in the public mind that was favourable to its reception, it found neither moral taste nor moral feeling. The heart and habits of society were utterly alien to its practical character. And that character, its ministers did not lower, nor relax, nor conceal, in order to ingratiate christianity or conciliate the passions. No, indeed; the apostles levelled the whole artillery of heaven against all the vices of all classes; and in the synagogues, the sanhedrim, and before the proconsular thrones, were equally bold and impartial in rebuking sin, while preaching Christ crucified.

Now, what was the effect? "Multitudes believed and turned unto the Lord." This is the account given by the friends of christianity: and its enemies said, that the apostles were "turning the world upside down."

I will not hazard an opinion as to the probable number of converts during the apostolic age. It is enough to say, that the christians were soon so numerous as to awaken both the jealousy and the fears of the Jews and Romans. The sanhedrim and the senate thought it necessary to persecute the church, at an early period of her existence. Does not this single fact refute the assertions of *Celsus*, *Julian*, and *Porphyry*, who say, that the first churches were composed only of servants, labourers, mechanics, and women? *Nero*, *Tiberius*, and *Domitian* evidently viewed them as a more formidable body. Or, if *this* was their general rank in life, their numbers must have been very great indeed, to excite such attention upon the throne of the Cæsars.

But it is the *character*, not the number, of the primitive christians, which belongs to this inquiry. Now, if they were, as their enemies affirm, from the *lowest* ranks of life, the more triumphant is the proof they furnish of the practical influence of christianity; for, amongst the lowest class in society, superstition is always strongest, and vice grossest. The ancient philosophers felt this; and, as much from *despair* as pride, did not attempt to reform the poor. Was it then the *lowest* Romans in Rome, who were so raised in character by the gospel, that their "*faith was spoken of throughout the whole world?*" Was it the *lowest* Jews in Jerusalem, who rose superior to the proverbial selfishness of their nation, and set the first example of a widows' fund, besides making all things common in the church? Was it the *lowest* of the Corinthians, Macedonians, and Achaians, who, out of their own deep poverty, contributed abundantly towards the relief of the poor saints in Jerusalem? Was it the *lowest* in all the provinces of the Roman

empire, who nobly braved the wrath of the *highest*, rather than return to Judaism or heathenism? If so, then the practical influence of christianity proves the divinity of its origin. JULIAN! you are vanquished again by the Galilean; for your charge defeats your own purpose; and your attempts to *rival* the benevolent institutions of the christians, prove the truth of their existence and influence.

But the primitive christians were publicly charged with sacrificing infants, with incest, and other abominations. *Marcus Minucius Felix*, in his OCTAVIUS, has given a triumphant refutation of this calumny. "Notwithstanding," says he, "such stories are blown about from mouth to mouth, nothing like them could ever be traced out or proved; nor, in all this time, one man produced to make the least discovery of the kind, although he might have obtained pardon and rewards for so doing." And, that the charge was false, is self-evident, from the fact, that the Roman tribunals did not attempt to prove it; but invariably acquitted every christian whom their tortures betrayed into a verbal renunciation of christianity.

2. *The practical influence of Christianity during the period of its early corruptions.*

The christianity of the New Testament was not long in the world, until it was corrupted by the world, and thus impaired in all its moral influence. The *Gnostics*, agreeably to the Magian philosophy of the East, denied the humanity of Christ, without admitting his proper divinity; and, of course, rejected the doctrine of his atonement, and derided the resurrection of the dead: thus rending from the gospel the grand truths which change the heart and enforce holiness. What, therefore, could be expected, but that *Gnosticism*, taught as it was in the first century by Oriental

philosophers, and organized into a semi-christian system in the second century, would lessen the practical influence of christianity itself; especially as it was aided in the counteraction of the truth, by the Judaism of the *Ebionites* and the Platonism of the Greek converts? Nor were these the only heresies of the primitive ages: christianity was soon more modified by sects than it is now; and, although each had its influence in drawing public attention to the new religion, the majority of them were hostile to its essential doctrines. But still, notwithstanding the many antichrists which thus went forth into the world, assuming the christian name, christianity continued to evince the divinity of its origin and energy, by signal triumphs over idolatry and vice. The proofs of this assertion are abundant in the appeals which her well-known APOLOGISTS addressed to the senate or people of Rome. *Justin Martyr*, speaking of the christians, says, "We, who formerly delighted in adultery, now observe the strictest chastity. We, who used the charms of magic, have devoted ourselves to the true God: and we, who valued money and gain above all things, now cast what we have in common, and distribute to every man according to his necessities."

"We deny not," says *Tertullian*, "a pledge left with us; we defile no man's marriage-bed; we piously educate orphans, relieve the indigent, and render to no man evil for evil."

Such appeals were common at the time; and then they were not *official* eulogiums on the church by hired champions. "Inquire," says Origen, in his *Contra Celsum*, "into the lives of some of us: compare our former and present mode of life, and you will find in what impieties and impurities men were involved before they embraced our doctrines. But, since they

embraced them, how just, grave, moderate, and constant are they become! yea, some are so inflamed with the love of purity and goodness, as to abstain even from lawful enjoyments: the church abounds with such men, wherever the doctrines of christianity have spread. How is it possible, then, that they can be pestilent members of society, who have converted many from the sink of vice to the practice of virtue, and a life of temperance conformable to the dictates of right reason? We reclaim women from immodesty —men from the wild extravagance of the sports, and youth from vice and luxury."

Agreeably to this appeal, *Lactantius* says, "They are not christians, but pagans, who rob by land, and commit piracy by sea; who poison their wives for their dowries, or their husbands that they may marry their adulterers; who strangle or expose infants, commit incest, and unnatural crimes too odious to relate." "Give me," says the same writer, when contrasting the practical influence of christianity and heathen philosophy; "give me a man who is choleric, abusive, headstrong and unruly: with a very few words—the words of God—I will render him gentle as a lamb. Give me an unjust man, a foolish man, a vicious man: and on a sudden he shall become honest, wise and virtuous. Did, or could, any of our heathen philosophers accomplish such important purposes as these?"

The substance of all these testimonies is confirmed by *Pliny's* Letter to *Trajan*. All that he could learn even from apostate christians was, "that their great crime consisted in assembling together on a stated day before light, to sing hymns to Christ as God; and that they bound themselves, by oath, not to the commission of any wickedness, but not to be guilty of

theft, or robbery, or adultery; never to falsify their word, nor to deny a pledge when called on to return it." He adds, "that though he put two christian women to the torture, he discovered nothing but a bad and excessive superstition:" that is, a piety that torture could not intimidate! I close this part of the evidence by an appeal to *Julian's* letter to the heathen pontiff *Arsacius*. "Observe," says the Emperor, "that the superstition of the christians was propagated by sanctity of life, by kindness to strangers, and by the attention they paid to the burial of the dead. It is a disgrace to the pagans to disregard those of their own religion, while christians do kind offices to strangers and enemies." Thus, from the death of the apostles, down to the middle of the *fifth* century, neither the counteracting influence of numerous and enormous heresies, nor the intimidation of frequent and ferocious persecutions, could prevent the spread of christianity, or the growth of its good fruits: and if these fruits were not uniformly so good as in the apostolic age, still they were infinitely better than philosophy has produced in any age; and inferior to the first-fruits only from the inferior cultivation of the parent tree.

Besides, it is capable of demonstration, that christianity preserved the Roman empire from *sudden* dissolution. She herself was injured by her elevation to the throne of the Cæsars; but she infused a vigour and virtue into the administration of Constantine, which gave a stability to the sceptre and to the laws, that they had not possessed for ages. A crisis was come, at which christians were the only "*salt* of the earth." The old Roman virtues were extinct, or so deteriorated, as to be insufficient to maintain the unity of the empire. Christians alone could be depended

on at the time; and, although the constitution was too much shattered to be repaired or upheld by them, they broke the rapidity and violence of its fall: for, but for them, the empire must have perished suddenly by its own vices, even if the Goths and Vandals had never issued from their forests to assail it. All history confirms this statement, and gives the lie to the insinuation of GIBBON, that christianity *hastened* the downfal of the empire. It both retarded and moderated the inevitable catastrophe: and, when the barbarian deluge burst upon Rome, the ark of christianity actually saved whatever was saved of the literature, science, and arts of the Capitol. It was christian ministers that lessened the rage and limited the ravages of *Attila* and *Alaric;* and had not the barbarian invaders been almost christians, and thus susceptible of some christian influence, it is more than probable that they would have burned the Capitol. "I feel within me something impelling me to burn Rome," said Alaric: but he only plundered it; and although, in doing so, the most venerable and valuable monuments of art and learning were demolished, all the christian churches were preserved by him, and both life and liberty granted to all christians and pagans who took refuge in them or at the tombs of the martyrs. In all this, it is readily granted, as it is deeply deplored, that the redeeming virtues are very few: but it is equally obvious that, if the Goths had invaded Rome under the banners of the *Scandinavian* gods, they would have spared nothing; and, if their invasion had happened while paganism was dominant, what a system must have sprung from a junction of the rites of Jupiter and Odin. Review,

3. *The practical influence of Christianity during the period of Popish domination.*

This period of church history is, in many respects, so repulsive, that, at first sight, the christian advocate is almost tempted to pass over it in silence, or to deny, because of its extreme corruptions, that it was Christianity which was then acting upon society. But, the moment he recollects that even Unitarianism, the *caput mortuum* of Christianity, has some practical influence, he feels assured that Popery, with all its faults, could not be fruitless. And it was not. The leaven it infused into the lump of European society was not pure nor powerful; but it had a reforming and refining influence far beyond any thing that ever philosophy accomplished or contemplated. The migratory and piratical habits of the nations became, gradually, domestic and agricultural; the sanguinary and ferocious, pacific; the gross and sensual, ceased to be shameless or unnatural. Human sacrifices were abolished at once, and polygamy was rapidly overthrown, wherever popery came. The widow and orphan, the poor and afflicted, found asylum or assistance from popish charities; and every religious edifice set the example of industry and improvement. Alfred and the English constitution were formed by popish christianity. And candour owes it to truth to admit the statement of Milner, in regard even to the popes in general, that "their supremacy served as a centre of union, and an ensign of orthodoxy;—that they were labourers in propagating the gospel in every part of the globe;—that they protected christendom, at several periods, from the Saracens, Tartars, and Turks;—that they civilized the nations they converted, and were often the chief patrons of literature and the polite arts;—that they formed the christian states into one great community, and for many ages preserved the liberties of Europe, by maintaining the balance of its

powers;—that, if they created some wars, they prevented or stopped more." In a word, popish christianity laid the foundation of liberty and law in Europe; and, as to the intolerant and tyrannical spirit of the Roman church, christianity did not teach it nor sanction it in any way, and is therefore in no wise accountable for it. Review,

4. *The practical influence of Reformed Christianity.*

We come now to a brighter period in the history of the church; and shall see, that in proportion as christianity was brought back to its primitive simplicity, it resumed its primitive influence. It must, however, be stedfastly recollected that, as apostolic christianity had to intermingle with the social mind which it found in the nations, and was thus inevitably modified, in some degree, by the Oriental mind in the East—by the Grecian mind in the Peloponnesus—by the Latin mind in the Roman empire; and, as these modifications of it had afterwards to amalgamate with all the varieties of the Gothic and Saxon mind in Europe; and thus it had its history marked "by great virtues and great vices, by many absurdities and much wisdom;"—so reformed christianity was inevitably modified, as it spread, by the spirit and manners of the respective nations that embraced it. However pure, therefore, the river of the water of life is in itself, it can only be "clear as crystal" at its fountain head in the throne of God and the Lamb, because it cannot find pure nor *uniform* channels on earth to flow in. As one says, "Ambrosia itself, if poured through a polluted channel, would still be a mixture of ambrosia and impurity." The only thing, therefore, that a candid inquirer can fairly demand is, that christianity should gradually purify its channels, and fertilize its sphere, to a degree which human philosophy

never did or could do. And this christianity has always done, even upon the worst channels: and, as it produced charity in Judea, chastity in Corinth, humility in Athens, and humanity in Rome; so it raised the nations which embraced the Reformation, as much above their popish state, as popish christianity had raised them above their druidic state.

The French Institute, in the tenth year of the Republic, gave their sanction to the following judicious rule for estimating the influence of the Reformation: "A daughter of renovating knowledge, the Reformation could doubtless be no other than favourable to its progress. But this child of light was conceived in an age still gloomy—in a world still in chaos—and in which a multitude of opposite principles fermented. Abandoned to all the passions which then prevailed, frequently disfigured in its exterior forms by the ignorance and superstition of those who contributed to its establishment, the Reformation, which originally tended only to good, has been the source of many evils. The good which it produced is the result of the spirit which constitutes its *essence;* the evils it occasioned depend in a great degree on the incidents with which it was accompanied, on the resistance opposed to it, and on the foreign motives joined to it. It is therefore necessary to consider two things, which cannot be blended without injustice: the one is, *the moral* impulse given primitively by it; the other is, the *commotion* which resulted from it, when to this primitive impulse so many other things were added, which modified it in different ways, and changed its nature. In a word, in the Reformation, the *spirit* and the *event*, the *intention* and the *effect*, must be considered." This maxim is as prudent as it is profound.

It will enable us still farther to judge of the practical

influence of christianity under the Reformation, if we mark the character of the nations which resisted it entirely, or but partially yielded to it. Compare (I should say, contrast) Austria with Protestant Germany, Spain with England, France with Scotland. Austria and Spain excluded the Reformation; France trifled with it; Italy had not intellect or conscience enough to understand its meaning. Accordingly, Austria is as sensual as it is enslaved; France as sceptical as it is volatile; and Italy is a nondescript amongst the nations. Whereas, in all the countries which embraced the Reformation, all things have changed for the better, more or less; and just because a greater measure of pure christianity was brought to bear upon them. *Review*

5. *The practical influence of the evangelical spirit and efforts which characterize our own times.*

When Whitefield and Wesley awoke from the trance and torpor of their age, the golden candlesticks of the Reformation were burning both dimly and coldly in the Church, and amongst the Dissenters. The *spirit* of "the ministry of reconciliation" was almost extinct in this country, and the very *letter* of it well nigh supplanted by heathen ethics and a spurious theology. Under this system the poor in general were left without Bibles, and without ability to read them; and the higher classes were as indifferent to religion as the lower were ignorant of it. The public amazement and indignation which then burst forth against the very doctrines that the Reformers and Puritans had preached with applause, reveal and demonstrate the state of things with which Whitefield and Wesley came in contact. Their *irregularities*, as clergymen, had, no doubt, some influence upon the public mind, because itinerant and field-preaching was like "a new

thing in the earth;" but, if the doctrines of justification by faith, and of regeneration by the Holy Spirit, had not been as uncommon at the time, as *uncanonical* hours and places were, they would not have been met with amazement and contempt; much less would these eloquent and disinterested preachers have been "spitefully used." But good report and bad report ministered to their success, and enabled them to give an impulse to all the churches, the benefits of which are incalculable. It was the *Methodism* of WALES which awoke that demand for Bibles, which led to the formation of the British and Foreign Bible Society. And there is no slight nor remote connexion between the labours of Whitefield and Wesley, and the whole host of the noble institutions which are now educating and evangelizing the world. And what is the practical effect of them? Never, certainly, was there at one time so much pure christian instruction emanating upon the world at large, or upon this country: and in this country,

"With all its faults,"

and notwithstanding all its present misfortunes, never was there an equal degree of sound morality and good feeling.

I am not afraid to affirm this, even in the face of all the juvenile delinquency and daring crime which prevail. These are not the effects of education, nor the failures of christianity, but the consequences of their *limitation;* for there is not yet adequate provision for the religious instruction of the community at large; and there will not be, until every church and chapel become a focus of moral reformation in its own immediate neighbourhood. So far as this has been attempted by Sunday Schools, by *visiting* Tract Associations, and

by bringing the poor under the ministry of the gospel, both vice and misery have been lessened. And *abroad*, the practical effects of christianity are, in some cases, sublime. The regenerated habits of the South Sea Islands, and of Southern Africa, present a moral spectacle, which, if infidelity *did* reason, might well shake her confidence in her own judgment, and shame her into everlasting silence. Look at the change produced on the heathen,

> " And let the light of nature, boasting man,
> Do so with *his* enchantments, if he CAN!"

LECTURE X.

THE EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY.

By JOHN MORISON.

LECTURE X.

THE EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY.

1 JOHN v. 10.

He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself.

I HAVE been entrusted, by my fathers and brethren in the ministry, with the discussion of a theme which, from its vital importance, involves me in a high measure of responsibility. Conscious, therefore, that I can only present to this respectable and well-instructed auditory the mere fragment of a great subject, I venture to cast myself upon that indulgence which the candour and intelligence of this fraternal association will not fail to exercise.

In searching for a text which might be fairly looked upon as embodying the topic of discourse announced in the printed list, I could fix on nothing more appropriate than the words of the beloved Disciple. They conduct us, by a direct course, to the Experimental Evidence of Christianity, and they describe the only process by which this species of evidence can be brought to bear on the human mind. Other branches of evidence seem to be the common property of all into whose hands the Sacred Oracles may fall; but of this it may be said, that "a stranger intermeddleth not with it." It is, as it were, that

most holy place in the christian temple into which none are permitted to enter save that spiritual priesthood, unto whom it is given to understand the mysteries of the kingdom. In perfect harmony with every other description of evidence, it is, at the same time, more vivid in its appeal, and more direct and simple in the method by which it wins its way to the heart. While learning, and acuteness, and minute investigation, are the qualities necessary to a full and comprehensive view of the evidences of Christianity in general; here is one department, at least, which may be claimed, though not exclusively, as the property of the poor and the illiterate, but which none can comprehend aright, except those who are taught by the Spirit of God.

It may be proper, therefore, to examine the precise nature of this species of evidence,—to illustrate the mode of its attainment,—and to exhibit the powerful influence which it has upon the reception of the christian faith. I am,

I. To examine the precise nature of the experimental evidence of Christianity.

In the appropriate language of the text, it is represented as a *witness* residing within the bosom of its possessor; for "*he that believeth on the Son of God,* HATH THE WITNESS IN HIMSELF."

Upon inquiry, it will be found, that the evidences of our holy faith are presented to the human mind in a most lovely series, and that at each successive step in this series we are furnished with the materials of a more confirmed belief, until we reach "the full assurance of understanding, of faith, and of hope," and until the truth of God becomes its own accredited witness in all the rich power of a celestial manifestation. To

prove the existence of such a series, it is not necessary to shew that every recipient of the christian faith has attained to a minute acquaintance with it, or has been conscious of the measure of influence it has had upon the growing convictions of his mind; it will be quite sufficient to glance at the state of fact, and to determine how far the apparatus of heaven is fitted to secure a gradual reception of the truth, when examined with sincerity, and plied with diligence.

Turn your attention, then, for a few moments, to that branch of evidence which has usually been denominated external; and which, under this general title, includes the argument deducible from *miracles* and *prophecy*.

In a mind really disposed, without prejudice, to meet the interrogatory,—"Is Christianity true or false?" I can conceive of nothing more calculated to awaken solemn reflection, and to bespeak the closest inquiry, than those external attestations of the truth of the Christian revelation, with which it has pleased the Most High to furnish his dependent and guilty creatures. Although there is nothing in the mystic power of a miracle—nothing in the divine prescience of a prophetic announcement—to convert the heart of an apostate sinner, and to recal him from the wanderings of a mind led captive by Satan at his will; yet is there much, both in the one and the other, to arrest the current of human thought, to stimulate our natural curiosity, and to draw down upon the communication of Heaven all the intensity of a sincere and determined scrutiny. It detracts nothing from this view of external evidence, that multitudes who saw the miracles of Christ, and who listened to his most august prophecies, remained indifferent, and even impenitent. "If I had not done among them," said the Saviour, "the works

which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father." And, again; "if I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloke for their sin." If you would fairly judge of the legitimate effect of a miracle, or of an accomplished prophecy, you must conceive of a state of mind exempt from prejudice, and at least disposed to lay aside that fool-hardihood of resistance which no external manifestations of divine power, unaccompanied with sensible inflictions of wrath, can conquer or subdue. Let but the mind of man, in connexion with the announcement of some system of religious truth, be accosted with any miraculous visitation—say the instant cure of an individual born blind, or, the resurrection of some beloved friend from the dead;—let it be apprised, that many prophecies uttered by Isaiah were accomplished several hundred years after their announcement,—and if it be not predetermined to resist every thing in the shape of a revelation, its most anxious solicitude will be roused, and its most active energies awakened and concentrated. If these remarks be correct, it will follow, that external evidence, the first link in that chain which binds the living oracles to the throne of God, is nothing more than the divinely appointed method of bespeaking man's attention to his best interests, and of rousing him to examine the contents of a communication which has been introduced to his notice by the mystic symbols of an interposition altogether super-human.

I cannot help, however, stating it as my belief, that those have been guilty of great indiscretion, who, in their zeal to strengthen the argument derived from this preliminary department of evidence, have spoken or written as if an attention to any other

branch of evidence were unnecessary or useless. And I cannot help fearing, that some of our ablest champions have, in this way, put a weapon into the hands of enemies, and retarded rather than advanced the cause they honestly intended to serve. I can look on external evidence in no other light than as a powerful excitement to inquiry. It may teach the folly, the criminality, and the danger of indifference to the message which it accompanies. It may leave the impenitent without excuse. It may create a most salutary impression of Divine interposition which, by the blessing of Heaven, may lead to an examination of the inspired record. But as it does not possess the real character of a *moral* agency, it is not capable of producing a moral impression, and must, therefore, utterly fail in effecting a genuine reception of the christian faith. In one word, it is something external to the message of the gospel itself, and may become the subject of speculation or even belief, while the doctrine it accredits remains unexamined, and the mind which contemplates it remains unchanged.

If we would not undervalue any part of those means which God has granted us for attaining to a belief in his revealed will,—if we would not shut ourselves out from all those sources of evidence which appeal most tenderly to every principle of our intellectual and moral nature,—if we would not precipitate ourselves to the rash conclusion, that the inspired truth of God has not the power of identifying itself to his erring and sinful creatures, we must pause ere we admit the position, that external evidence is the only weapon by which we can combat the avowed enemies of Christianity—the only sure method by which we can settle and establish our own minds in the belief of the truth. The bare announcement of such a position is calcu-

lated to impede the reception of the gospel, and to throw a fearful stumbling-block in the way of an unbeliever. It is just, in other words, telling him—"this is a book which contains the only true religion—which reveals the only method of salvation to mankind; but you have nothing to do with its contents, save only to believe them; its divine authenticity and inspiration you are solely to judge of by circumstances, most striking indeed, yet altogether foreign to itself." Now, if the Great Author of truth had seen fit to reduce us to such a necessity, it would have been our duty to submit to it with cheerfulness. But where is there any intimation of such a necessity? Or what is there in the doctrines and precepts of the gospel that should lead us to shrink from challenging infidelity to prove that there is aught in them opposed to the character of God, or unsuitable to the constitution and the condition of man? Is the subject matter of revelation so entirely new to the human mind, that it has no data, within the range of its own consciousness and its own feelings, by which to judge of its probability or truth? Or, is the method by which Christianity proposes to accomplish its mighty and benevolent object so utterly at variance with all the principles by which we attempt to influence our fellow-creatures, or by which we are ourselves acted upon, that we have no common sympathies with the mode of its operation? I am persuaded the negative of both these positions may be fairly taken. Surely a system of religion, which comes from the Father of our spirits; which professes to exhibit a history of the divine conduct to man; which unfolds the nature of those principles which regulate the moral government of the Universe; which states and enforces truths, the knowledge and belief of which it connects with the favour of God, the approbation of conscience, and the

glories and felicities of an eternal duration;—surely a system thus distinguished, (if its claim to divine authority be properly supported,) will not be without sufficient proof of its truth, independent of every argument which may be derived from the consideration of external evidence.

"When we read a history which authoritatively claims to be an exhibition of the character of God in his dealings with men—if we find in it that which fills and overflows our most dilated conceptions of moral worth and loveliness in the Supreme Being, and at the same time feel that it is triumphant in every appeal that it makes to our consciences, in its statements of the obliquity and corruption of our own hearts,—and if our reason farther discovers a system of powerful moral stimulants, embodied in the facts of this history, which necessarily tend to produce in the mind a resemblance to that high character which is there pourtrayed;—if we discern that the spirit of the history gives peace to the conscience by the very exhibition which quickens its sensibility,—that it dispels the terrors of guilt, by the very fact which associates sin with the full loathing of the heart,—that it combines in one wondrous and consistent whole, our most fearful forebodings and our most splendid anticipations for futurity,—that it inspires a pure and elevated and joyful hope for eternity, by those very declarations which attach a deeper and more interesting obligation to the discharge of the minutest part of human duty;—if we see that the object of all its tendencies is the perfection of moral happiness, and that these tendencies are naturally connected with the belief of its narration;—if we see all this in the gospel, we may then say that our own eyes have seen its truth, and that we need no other testimony: we may then well

believe, that God has been pleased, in pity to our wretchedness, and in condescension to our feebleness, to clothe the eternal laws which regulate his spiritual government, in such a form as may be palpable to our conceptions, and adapted to the urgency of our necessities."*

Let no one imagine, however, that I intend, by any thing I have hitherto advanced, to disparage the external evidences of the gospel, or to put one class of evidence in the room of another. I see a delightful harmony between both branches of evidence, and perceive distinctly that he who is stimulated to inquire by the one, will be furnished with an ample, delightful, and satisfactory field of inquiry by the other. All I wish to guard against is, that doubtful mode of speaking about *internal* evidence which might lead an opponent to think that we had some hesitation in throwing the Bible on its own merits; or which might give rise to the suspicion, that it was not capable of becoming its own witness, to the utter discomfiture, and to the final overthrow of all its enemies.

But let us now pause for a moment, and ask ourselves, what is the great object proposed by the individual who honestly investigates the two departments of evidence which we have just slightly touched upon? Is it not one of the grandest that can possibly be submitted to the scrutiny of the human mind? Where could we point to another object of superior, or even of equal moment? To know whether God has authoritatively spoken to us or not, is surely a branch of inquiry so awfully interesting to the human family, that he who neglects to satisfy himself upon it, is guilty of a degree of levity which there is no term in

* Erskine's Remarks on Internal Evidence, pp. 18, 19.

our language to express. And if it be true, that wherever the Bible is conveyed, it carries with it the full blaze of its own evidence, what a pressure of guilt and responsibility must rest upon the unhappy millions, who have no impression of the authority and grace of God as speaking to them in his own word. That the Most High should have vouchsafed a revelation of mercy to his apostate creatures, — a revelation the truth of which is attested "by so great a cloud of witnesses"—and yet that it should fail to realize an universal and cordial reception, is a circumstance which requires to be accounted for upon some satisfactory principle. Were the revelation unimportant, or were the evidence of its truth defective, or in any degree recondite, and beyond the common reach of the human faculties, there would be no just ground of surprise; but when the very reverse of this is the case,—when we call to remembrance that the subject of the Bible is the divine method of saving human souls,—that its truth is supported by a weight of evidence which no one can discredit without trampling on all the ordinary means of belief,—that its most commanding and influential statements stand forth, as it were, on its very surface, and are embodied in forms of language, unrivalled alike in simplicity and force:—when we take all these things into account, and yet contemplate the avowed infidelity of some, the more concealed unbelief of others, and the awful indifference of the mass of human beings with whom we mingle, we are convinced that there must be some generic principle, if it can be ascertained, which will account for this fearful state of things which exists; and by which too we may have suggested to our minds the only satisfactory reason why any individual of the human race is led so to attend to the evidence

of the gospel, as to receive from it the stamp of its regenerating influence.

Do we then stand in need of no more evidence? I answer unhesitatingly—*not an atom more,* to satisfy the sincere and humble inquirer. And with regard to those who are strangers to these qualities of mind, had the Bible been placed on the basis of mathematical demonstration, it would not have been a whit more acceptable to them, provided its moral character had been perfectly retained. It is not more evidence that is wanted,—nor is it more favourable circumstances—nor is it a more urgent necessity—nor is it a greater condescension, on the part of Heaven, in the form of invitation, promise, and intreaty:—it is not any thing of this kind that is wanted; but it is something that shall make man truly alive to his spiritual interests,—that shall touch, as by the power of magic, the dormant and stupified powers of the inner man,—that shall give to him, as by an intuition, the faculty of recognizing and the disposition of obeying God's authority in his word. There can be nothing—and there need be nothing added to the gospel; but there must be something done to the human mind, as the recipient of the gospel. It is no detraction from the rich beauties of nature, as they present themselves to our attention at this lovely season,* that the man who was born blind, can appreciate none of them. Nor is it any detraction from the truth or loveliness of the gospel, that the individual who is spiritually blind cannot discern them, so as to derive from them any impression of divine power and excellence. I will not attempt to decide how far the unregenerate mind may advance in the speculative knowledge or belief of divine truth—how

* The Spring.

far the evidences of the gospel may be felt by such a mind to be conclusive; but I will venture to say, that no man can have "the witness in himself," as to the truth of the christian faith, who has not been brought under the influence of the Spirit's teaching, and who has not become the subject of views, impressions, and feelings which the most perfect series of evidence could never have produced.

If, as in subjects of general science, the gospel had only to contend with simple ignorance, nothing more would be necessary than merely to present its evidences to the human mind, and to wait the result. But here it is far otherwise. The completeness of the evidence is equalled only by the inestimable worth and the peculiar adaptation of the message; and yet, as if an enemy to the human race, the gospel has every where to brave the most determined opposition, and assumes the government of no heart which it has not, in the first instance, conquered by the force of its spiritual artillery.

There is a fact which I must not forbear in this place to mention, because I cannot but consider it as highly illustrative of the train of thought we are now pursuing. It is the extraordinary circumstance, that not a few who have written with great ability in support of Christianity, have, at the same time, when they came to explain their views of its peculiar truths, shewn themselves decidedly hostile to the very system they undertook to defend: as if a religion could be true as a whole, and yet false in its individual parts. Now what is the language of such a fact as this? I think it is two-fold: *first,* that the gospel is not wanting in evidence, for the individuals in question have proved it; and, *secondly,* that something more than mere evidence is necessary to a vital reception of the

heavenly message. At first sight, perhaps, it is not easy to reconcile these two statements; but, with the Bible in our hands, and human nature before us, to illustrate and confirm its declarations, we shall find that they present no paradox, that they are both equally true, and that, in fact, a man may be an adept in weighing christian evidence, and at the same time totally unprepared for taking the lowest form in the school of Christ. Although "the natural man" may be capable of estimating the completeness of the abstract evidence in favour of the gospel; he, nevertheless, "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned;" and except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Hence it follows, that the *experimental evidence* of Christianity is something more than the result of a mere process of induction and argumentation. There is nothing, indeed, to forbid its possessor to be a philosopher and a man of science; but he must be something more; he must become as a little child; he must renounce the guidance of corrupt and fallen reason, and seek direction from above; he must offer himself to the divine consideration in the humiliating character of a ruined transgressor; his lofty imaginations must be humbled; speculation must be exchanged for devout and prayerful thought; and the entire contents of the gospel must be taken home to the heart with all the intensity of a personal application. The *evidence* which such an individual will attain of the truth of the gospel will be very distinct from every other species of evidence. Other branches of evidence have their existence irrespective of a recipient; but this depends on the very act of reception, and, previous to that important act, can have no existence. Other branches of evidence are so many arguments to shew the wisdom of embracing, and the folly of rejecting the christian faith; but this is that last, that crowning evidence, which, in the order of nature, succeeds all other evidences, which is not so much an argument for the reception of the gospel, as a declaration that it has been received,—that an *experiment* has been made—and that christianity is all that with respect to the divine character, and all that with respect to the condition, character, and happiness of man, which it professes to be.

When the gospel comes into actual contact with the soul of man, when it is received in the spirit of love, it shines into the heart in the full blaze of its own evidence, and gives forth on the convictions of the mind, the most satisfying proof, that its origin is of God. Thus it is, that the faith of a genuine christian does not rest exclusively, or even mainly, on the general evidences of the gospel, however striking; but on the power of God, confirming its genuineness by its mighty workings in his own heart. The conviction he thus reaches is less the result of *speculation* than of *feeling;* for as no reasonings in the world could be so powerful to convince him of the existence of the sun, as his own perceptions of the light and heat of that glorious luminary, so no argument in defence of the gospel can be so vivid or permanent in its impression, as the consciousness of God's own manifestation to the soul; a manifestation which never fails to impress the conviction, that the gospel is alike the *power* of God and the *wisdom* of God to every one that believeth.*

* See an admirable discourse, by the late Mr. Pirie, of Newburgh, on this subject.

I am not ignorant of the fact, that this view of evidence has been stigmatized by many, from whom better things might have been expected, as mystical and enthusiastic; but this should awaken no surprise, and should call forth no resentment. Experimental religion, which is the religion not of creeds and synods, but of the heart, has always been considered by the lukewarm and profane as irrational, extravagant, and hypocritical. This is a part of the cross which all who are taught of God must be content to bear; and who is so well prepared for such endurance, as the man who, whilst the world frowns, is conscious of the smile of celestial approbation, and who knows that that which on earth is pronounced to be a dream of the imagination, is looked on by angels, and by God himself, as the divinest reality?

Yet it cannot be denied that there is a danger on this head of affording just ground for the charge of enthusiasm. Many talk about their frames and feelings as if they were under the immediate inspiration of God. This is very hateful in itself, and very injurious in its effects. I am not at present contending for the fooleries of a disordered imagination, but for the living experimental power of religion in the hearts of the redeemed. I am not advocating the phraseology of a crude and undigested theology; but I am enforcing the great doctrine taught by our Lord and his apostles—that the kingdom of heaven is *within a man*, and that it consists "not in meats and drinks, but in peace, in righteousness, and in joy in the Holy Ghost."

Let every thing in christian experience be subjected to a scriptural test, and then there will be nothing in it that is vague, nothing forced, nothing extravagant, nothing useless; but all will bear the

impress of that divine agent, who is "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in Christ Jesus." But in arming ourselves against the conceits of fanaticism, let us never be tempted, for one moment, to abandon the invaluable doctrine, that there is a self-witnessing power accompanying the genuine reception of the gospel. We want to see more of that vigorous and masculine Christianity which obtained in days of old, and which led its possessors to rejoice in the inward witness of the Spirit. "We know," said they, "that he abideth in us by the Spirit that he hath given us."—"Hereby we know that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit."—"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."—"We have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."—"If any man be in Christ Jesus, there is a new creation; old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new."—"He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself;" yes, he hath this witness in the renovation of a corrupt heart; in the conscious existence and progressive influence of the love of God; in the victory which his faith has achieved over the evil that is in the world; and in the lively hope of eternal life which has been kindled in his bosom, and by which he has been led to purify himself, even as Christ is pure.

Let us highly prize all the evidences of our holy faith, and be thankful to God for them all; but let us above all labour to possess a witness for the truth within us, that from what the gospel has effected in our own experience, we may be prepared to decide triumphantly, that "we have not believed cunningly devised fables."

II. I promised, in the second place, to illustrate the mode by which the experimental evidence of Christianity is to be attained.

On this important branch of the subject it will be necessary to observe the greatest simplicity both as to thought and expression, and to guard against all those metaphysical subtilties which have been so often pressed into inquiries of this nature, but which have only tended to weaken the impression of truth on the human heart. It is obvious then, from the words of St. John, that the description of evidence under consideration can have no place in any mind that has not surrendered itself unreservedly to the authority of what is testified in the living oracles in relation to the person and offices of Messiah; for "*he* only that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself." Although I am quite prepared to maintain that there is a beautiful series in the evidences of Christianity—a series which human ingenuity or imposture could never have devised—yet am I equally disposed to believe, that the man who knows nothing of this series, yea, who may be a total stranger to the question of evidence in general, in all its technical forms, if he but believe in Christ, as freely presented to sinners in the gospel, by this one act places himself in a situation in which, in the absence of all acute and speculative knowledge, he is destined to receive the full impression of that saving truth, of which Jesus Christ is the sum and substance. Here, perhaps, is the most striking peculiarity attaching to the experimental evidence of the gospel, that it dawns upon the mind through the medium of belief, and not by any process of argumentation, however scriptural, or however well sustained. In order to its

attainment, it is not required that we should possess a minute acquaintance with the apologies of friends, or with the cavils of enemies; it is only necessary that the enlightened eye of faith should be directed to a crucified Saviour; that all things should be counted loss for the excellency of his knowledge;—and that every rival, whether of his authority or his love, should be driven from that bosom in which he deigns to take up his sacred abode. I would by no means dissuade any of you from the careful examination of those incomparable works which have been written in defence of Christianity. They may be read with unspeakable profit, and they cannot fail to impart an exquisite satisfaction; but after all, it is the Holy Scriptures themselves which testify of Christ, and it is from lively faith in his divine and mediatorial character, as therein delineated, that the experimental witness to the truth and power of the gospel must, in every instance, spring.

I shall not here attempt to explain the nature of that faith to which such stupendous effects are ascribed both in the text, and elsewhere. It appears to me, that every attempt to explain its abstract nature, is futile and injurious; in as far as mere belief can be nothing more or less, whatever be the subject to which it relates. The *state of mind*, however, in which a sinner is led to believe in the Son of God, is an object of legitimate inquiry, as are also the effects which invariably accompany a surrender of the heart to his authority. That a man cannot truly believe in the Son of God "except it be given him from above," is a truth which all Scripture, and all experience alike confirm. "No man," says the Saviour, "can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him;" and as to the effects of genuine faith, we know that it

"purifieth the heart, worketh by love, and overcometh the world;" and I may add, that in so doing, it realizes the distinguished privilege in the text, and causes its partaker to know, that "he who believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself."

It may be objected, perhaps, to this view of things, that there are many who truly believe on Christ, who have not this witness in themselves. I am disposed to reply in the negative. But in settling this difficulty, all will depend on the view that is taken of the real character of this witness. Remember it is not any powerful persuasion of the safety of your own state—of your direct and positive interest in the blessings of salvation. This is by no means the witness referred to in the text. The meaning of the apostle John is simply this,—that every man who truly comes to Christ, by faith, has in the very act of coming, and in that transformation of mind and character which ensues, an evidence *within himself* of the divine truth, and power, and loveliness of the gospel, such as no process of ratiocination could impart. And has not every genuine christian such a witness to the truth of the gospel within him? Is he not conscious of belief in Christ? And ought he not to honour the sovereign workings of that grace which has placed him in striking contrast with his former self, and which has effected that stupendous change in him which no other system of means, however admirably adapted, could have produced?

It now only remains,

III. In the third and last place, that I should endeavour to exhibit the influence which the experimental evidence has on the reception of the christian faith.

I cannot but exceedingly regret, that the extended character of this discourse will only permit me to make a remark or two on this most vital branch of my subject. But I am satisfied it is capable of being turned to great account in favour of the gospel. It may be said, indeed, that the personal convictions of a believer's mind can never be adduced as an argument in support of the christian faith. And perhaps there is some weight in the objection. But if the *individual* is to be discarded, as incapable of producing decisive evidence as to the truth of the gospel; is the *goodly fellowship* of the redeemed to be thus dismissed? Is it nothing to listen to the unbroken testimony of thousands and tens of thousands of the wisest and best of men that ever trod this earth? Although in strict propriety, it may be urged that this is nothing but the *expaŕte* homage of interested or prejudiced friends; and although, in the absence of other arguments, it were dangerous too vehemently to press this; yet I cannot hide from my mind the fact, that multitudes, in every age, have been drawn to the christian standard, by the steady faith, the ardent zeal, the consistent lives, and the happy deaths of those, who, believing on the Son of God, have had the witness in themselves.

Let it never be forgotten, moreover, that of all the agencies, under God, which can be employed in advancing the interests of the christian faith, nothing is so powerful and resistless as the agency of spiritually-minded and devoted christians. They believe, and therefore speak;—they believe, and therefore labour to commend the Saviour to their fellow men. If a time should ever arrive in which there were no genuine christians in the community,—no living epistles of Christ known and read of all men; it would then be

found, I am persuaded, that all set arguments, in defence of the evidences of Christianity, would cease to be influential; and it would then also be ascertained, that the abstract appeal is exceedingly powerless, where there is no living example of christian excellence to support it.

The more vivid and confirmed, then, any man's belief is of the divine realities of the gospel, the more suitable is he as an agent for its diffusion in the circle of his acquaintance. He may not be a profound reasoner,—he may not even possess fluency of address; but there will be a stamp of genuineness and christian excellence about the whole of his deportment, which will be understood by all, felt by some, and imitated by not a few.

Why are we honoured in so slight a degree in communicating the power of godliness to others? May not the reason be, that the light of faith is dim, and the flame of love is cold in our own bosoms? Would not God honour us much more in this way, if there were less of hesitation and more of decision in our characters? So long as our own Christianity remains a problem, (and it must do so while we are strangers to the inward witness of the truth,) we shall find ourselves wanting in the most effectual means of combating the enemies of the gospel. When an individual knows that he has "tasted, and felt, and handled the word of life," he is necessarily inspired with a confidence and joy pre-eminently favourable to holy activity, and bold and generous action in the service of the Lord Jesus. It is most deeply to be lamented that so few of those who name the name of Jesus, have any *comforting* assurance of the truth of the gospel, derived from *actual experience* of its efficacy. "These things," said the Apostle John, "have I written unto

you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may *know* that ye have eternal life." There are those who speak of darkness and doubt, in spiritual exercises, as if they constituted the very essence of christian experience. A greater mistake there cannot be, nor one more dishonouring to him who would have all his servants lay aside "the spirit of bondage," and cry "Abba, Father." The glory of *personal* Christianity is not to *doubt*, but to *believe*—to "believe with the heart unto righteousness." It is indeed a mournful spectacle, to see the religion of the gospel identified with lukewarmness and worldly concession on the one hand, and gloomy uncertainty and doubt on the other. By living below their privileges, professing christians dishonour their divine Lord, and deprive themselves of the exquisite enjoyment which Christianity is fitted to yield; while at the same time they frustrate their usefulness, in their day and generation, as witnesses for God, and living epistles of Christ.

Could the actual number of happy, because *experimental* christians, be greatly increased, the conversion of the world would thereby be prodigiously accelerated. In the present state of the church, there is so much indecision on the one hand, and so much uncertainty on the other, that the testimony arising from the christian profession is exceedingly equivocal. So few comparatively have received the word "in power, in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance," that little is seen in professors of the gospel, more than in other men, to win disciples to the Lord Jesus. What enemies, my brethren, to the interests of vital Christianity, are the spirit of the world and the spirit of doubt! A *worldly* professor gives the lie to his avowed creed, and throws a shade of uncertainty over the genuineness of religion at large. And an *unhappy*

professor, who knows but little of the gospel as a source of peace and solid enjoyment, must act as a kind of repellent, to drive men away from the region of his own melancholy. It is the devoted—the assured—the happy believer that may hope to commend the gospel to others; and it is he only whose general character will leave behind it the savour of that religion which brings "glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will towards men."

In conclusion, let me urge professors of the gospel in general not to rest contented in occupying the *middle walks of Christianity*, but to aim at the highest possible attainments, and at the liveliest possible experience of "the truth as it is in Jesus." To rank with the avowed disciples of the Saviour, and yet to have no inward abiding witness of the truth of his gospel, is indeed an unhappy condition, and one greatly to be shunned. Be determined, by God's help, to enter fully and unreservedly into the spirit of Christianity. Seek that "unction from the Holy One," by which you *may know all things*. Do not stand loitering at the door of the Christian temple, but enter its hallowed gate, approach its sacred altar, and offer yourself "a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." Make full proof of what the gospel can effect in you, by an entire surrender of your mind to its mild and transforming influence. Suffer not yourselves to remain in ignorance or uncertainty about any of its blessed truths. Remember, if they are properly—that is spiritually—discerned, and taken home to the bosom in the exercise of a living faith, they cannot fail to become their own witness, and to carry with them the demonstration of celestial wisdom and power.

I beseech you not to mistake education, habit, speculative attainments, for the religion of Christ. All the formalists, hypocrites, and apostates who have ever lived, have been acquainted, in some measure, with the theory of the gospel; but they had not the *witness* in themselves; they were not acquainted with the truth in its experimental evidence; they knew not the mysteries of that hidden life of faith, which imparts to the soul a foretaste of celestial bliss.

And, Oh! forget not, that it is the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in Christ Jesus that can constitute any man an *experimental* christian. That faith which reveals Christ to the soul is of the operation of the Divine Spirit. His character must be honoured, and his influence must be implored. For the want of a sufficient homage to this celestial agent, the zeal of many waxes cold. He only can fan that flame which by his own sacred energy he has kindled. From Him, therefore, may we all receive that light which is necessary in order to discern, and that impression which is necessary in order to feel, the truths of the everlasting gospel; then shall our witness be within, and our record on high.

LECTURE XI.

THE BEST METHODS OF COUNTERACTING INFIDELITY.

By ROBERT WINTER, D.D.

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2 Cor. x. 4.

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.

To a person who had impartially attended to the evidences by which revealed religion is supported, but who had not adverted to existing facts, it would appear almost incredible that there should be such a thing as infidelity. That Christianity is true—that it is of heavenly origin—and that it is the great expedient, by means of which the Supreme Being designs to enlighten and renovate and save the world, are propositions which rest on the most clear and convincing testimony. The nature of that testimony, and its various bearings on this great subject, have occupied your attention, and that of your ministers, in these monthly Lectures, from the commencement of the present year. And they esteem it no small honour to follow in the train of many great men, who have pleaded the cause of our holy religion against the objections of the infidel. Owen, Baxter, and Howe, Lardner and Doddridge, Paley and Watson, are a few names selected from a host of champions, who have gone forth into this warfare, and have successfully

defended the claims of the gospel to an origin truly divine.

But an important question arises, which constitutes the subject appointed for consideration this day,—"What are the best methods of counteracting Infidelity?" To this inquiry the language of the text furnishes a most suitable reply,—"The weapons of our warfare," the means by which we are to pursue this great object, "are not carnal,"—not of a secular description,—"but they are mighty." Argument—persuasion—the simple exhibition of truth—the practical results of Christianity; these, "through" the power of "God," and the influence of his Spirit, become happily effectual; and the "strong holds" of unbelief, the most potent opposition which it can offer, will yield to the penetrating energy. The methods by which the apostles, and the other primitive teachers of the gospel, sought to destroy idolatry, and every other obstacle to the propagation of the truth, are just the methods, with the exception indeed of the aid arising from miracles, and the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit, by which we may hope to succeed in our efforts to subdue the opposition of modern infidelity.

In entering on the inquiry to which this discourse is devoted, I must take the liberty of declaring unreservedly, that I consider the sword of civil authority to be a weapon not in the least adapted to this important warfare. There have been instances—unhappy instances I must call them—in which infidel writers have, for giving publicity to their opinions, been brought under legal censure, and have been subjected to severe penalties. It appears to me, that the magistrate departs from his own province when he interferes with opinions. On this subject I cannot better express my own views, than in the language of Dr. WARDLAW, of

Glasgow—"Men should be free to think as they are free to breathe. I make no exceptions. Let truth defend herself, and defend herself by her own legitimate means,—she is well able to do so. Nor does she stand in need of any auxiliary method, beyond those of fair argument or rational persuasion. Give her an open field, and the free use of her weapons, and she will stand her ground. Legal restraint and suppression have invariably had the effect of giving ten-fold prevalence to the dreaded error; and measures of coercion, whilst they have made hypocrites by thousands, have never made, and never can make, one genuine convert to her cause."*

To this quotation allow me to annex another, from the pen of my highly esteemed friend, the pastor of this church. It is taken from the Preface to his "Lectures on the Roman Catholic Religion;" a work, which I must so far digress from my subject, as very strongly to recommend to the perusal of my hearers; not only for the able defence of Protestantism, which characterizes every page, but also for the truly enlarged and valuable sentiments on a variety of important topics, which it incidentally supports. On the great question of religious liberty, he thus expresses his own views, in which I most fully and cordially unite—"If there be any sentiment which he," the author, "is disposed to hold with the most tenacious grasp, it is this; that every individual, and every society, possess an unalienable right to worship God according to the dictates of their consciences, and that all secular interference *on account of religion*, by penalties or restrictions, is irrational, impolitic, and unscriptural. The only effectual means of counteracting error, are

* Wardlaw's Two Sermons on "Man responsible for his Belief."

persuasion and argument; and these alone comport with the sacredness of truth, and the dignity of religion."*

The reasoning of Dr. Doddridge on this subject, in his Theological Lectures, is strong and unanswerable. And in his Sermon on "the Absurdity and Iniquity of Persecution for Conscience' Sake, in all its Kinds and Degrees," are some statements in reference to it which deserve the serious attention of those who think that error, of whatever kind, may be eventually destroyed by fines and penalties laid on those who uphold it.

In support of these representations, which are exactly applicable to our subject, we might advert to the language of scripture, and to the plan pursued by the great Author of Revelation from the beginning. The prediction of Isaiah, respecting the kingdom of the Messiah, "He shall smite the earth with *the rod of his mouth,* and with *the breath of his lips* shall he slay the wicked† ;" referring doubtless to the promulgation of his word;—that memorable declaration of our blessed Lord, "My kingdom is not of this world‡;"—and the declaration of the Apostle Paul in the text, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal,"—are sufficient to convince us, that error is to be successfully opposed only by the promulgation of truth.

But if the carnal weapons of human authority are insufficient,—if indeed they are prohibited means of advancing the cause of truth,—are there no other weapons which may be employed in this great warfare? Assuredly there are. And to the consideration of these I proceed with much pleasure to invite your attention.

* Fletcher's Lectures on the Principles and Institutions of the Roman Catholic Religion.

† Isaiah xi. 4. ‡ John xviii. 36.

Among "the best methods of counteracting infidelity," allow me to mention,

FIRST,—The frequent and public statement of the evidences of revelation.

This is the method which has been pursued at large in the present course of our monthly exercises, and likewise in another Lecture, which was carried on in the metropolis in the course of the last winter and spring.* The evidences of revelation form a class of subjects which has perhaps been with too little frequency brought before our auditories. To be always laying the foundation,—to give a disproportionate measure of attention to the ground of our faith, so as to keep out of sight what we are required to believe, and the influence of faith on the heart and character,—would be manifestly going to a pernicious extreme. But it is of no small importance, that every one should be able to give a reason of his hope. If "our faith stand, not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God," this should be clearly demonstrated; and the demonstration is so plain and so strong, that it may be easily brought before the understanding of any one. Indeed, if the evidences which support our most holy faith are not frequently adduced, there is great danger that a general conviction of the truth of the gospel should rest on the insufficient ground of human authority, instead of being supported simply and altogether by the testimony of God. The course of subjects adopted in the first division of our list, was therefore well chosen. And if topics of a similar kind were brought before our hearers with greater frequency in the usual

* "The Mechanics' Lecture;" under the sanction of the "Christian Instruction Society."

part of the book some powerful answer to the suggestions of the infidel.

It is much to be feared, that amidst the benevolent exertions of the present day, and for which it is justly commended, the great duty of "Searching the Scriptures" is not so carefully and seriously performed as it was in the days of our fathers. It is a much easier thing to declaim in favour of the Bible, than to inquire diligently into its contents. It is, however, where this practice is observed, and there only, that we can expect to form a powerful counteraction to the efforts which are made to seduce professing christians, and especially the young, from the faith of the gospel. Suffer me, then, earnestly to recommend to all my hearers the daily and serious perusal of "the lively oracles," availing themselves of every opportunity of acquiring a large and comprehensive acquaintance with their contents and design. And as there are many ways, now in operation, by which the holy volume may be generally and largely circulated, suffer me to intreat your attention to some of these. By dispersing copies of the Scriptures in every neighbourhood, and using every reasonable method of inviting all persons to make themselves acquainted with them, we are incidentally taking one of the most effectual ways of counteracting the prevalence of infidelity. Objections may arise from what they suppose it to be, which will entirely vanish, when they see for themselves what it is.

THIRDLY,—We shall powerfully counteract the efforts of infidelity by the sedulous instruction of the young in the evidences and the principles of revealed religion.

If the disciples of infidelity are generally those who are in a great measure uninstructed in religious

principles, then it follows, that, to prevent the prevalence of infidelity, it is of unspeakable importance to diffuse religious knowledge. Every principle which demonstrates the advantage of general education, will apply with augmented force to the education of the young in the truths and obligations of the gospel.

Religious education, properly so called, has been much neglected, even in religious communities, and by persons professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him. While no expense has been spared, and no sacrifices have been thought excessive, to secure to young people an acquaintance with languages, with general literature, and with every object of science which may be beneficial to them in the world, it is much to be deplored, that very little has been done to enlighten the opening mind with the knowledge of religion. With respect to family instruction, I am afraid we must be constrained to say, that the former times were better than these. The attention which was given to the best interests of the younger branches of religious households, and particularly among the old nonconformists, was most praiseworthy. Not only was every member of the family habituated to attend public worship, with a constancy which no pleas could interrupt, but those of necessity and mercy, in the morning and afternoon of the Lord's day; but the evening of that day was uniformly devoted to domestic worship and instruction. The seed which had been sown in the public assembly, was watered by the familiar conferences of parents and heads of families with the junior and inferior members of their households, on the subjects which had engaged their attention through the day. Catechetical instruction was then regularly given, and every effort was made, by reading the Scriptures and other valu-

services of the Lord's day, they would excite attention to the general theme, and would put our people, especially our young people, in possession of those means of defence by which they might be preserved from the snares which infidelity is placing in their way.

The press likewise furnishes a very powerful method of enlightening the public mind. There is not, indeed, any deficiency of valuable writings in the various branches of this important theme. Sermons, essays, dissertations on the evidences of the gospel, both external and internal, are exceedingly numerous; and by the perusal and the circulation of these, we may do essential service to the general cause. The converts to modern infidelity are generally found among those whose reading on these subjects has been very small and very superficial. The suggestions against revelation, which have proceeded from the pens of unbelievers, have often been dressed in plausible language, and have been much adapted to arrest the attention. But where they have met with those who were previously acquainted with the evidence arising from comparative views of the Mosaic and Christian economy, from prophecy, from miracles, from the character of Christ, from his resurrection, from christianity itself, (what is usually termed the internal evidence,) or from its practical influence, there has not appeared any thing in the objection which is not abundantly and most satisfactorily refuted. And every new publication on these subjects, although containing, as must be the case, the renewal of former statements, is adapted increasingly to promote the interests of truth, as it may be expected to engage the attention of those who would not be attracted by publications of more ancient date.

SECONDLY,—Another method by which infidelity may be powerfully counteracted, is the extensive circulation of the inspired volume.

Infidelity has had the most powerful sway where the Holy Scriptures have been scarcely known. This has been, and yet continues, to be most lamentably the case in Roman-catholic countries. The prohibition of the general reading of the Bible, together with the introduction of doctrines and practices which that sacred book never taught nor enjoined, has led many, who have formed their estimate of christianity merely from what has passed before their eyes, to conclude, that it is a religion unworthy of a heavenly origin, and therefore no better than a cunningly devised fable. The circulation of the Scriptures in these countries is a most desirable object, were it only for the sake of informing the inhabitants what christianity really is. The effects which have been produced by the exertions of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and its indefatigable labourers, have been greater than could have been expected: and it may be confidently hoped, that all similar exertions will, with the blessing of God, in some measure counteract the deadly poison of infidelity.

In our own highly favoured land, there is yet very lamentable ignorance of the Holy Scriptures; and upon this ignorance the disciples of infidelity are working with no small success. It is easy to prevail on people to relinquish the religion of the Bible, when they know not what the religion of the Bible is. But let the word of God be put into the hands of all classes; and if they can but be prevailed on to read it with attention, and to make themselves acquainted with its infinitely important contents, they will find in every

able publications, and by devotional engagements of prayer and praise, to diffuse through the domestic circle "the savour of the knowledge of Christ." The usefulness of MATTHEW MEAD was unquestionably facilitated and enlarged by the exercises of family instruction and family worship, which, through his large congregation, followed his warm and impressive exhortations within these ancient walls.* And "the good of early obedience," which he largely illustrated from the pulpit and the press, was promoted by the co-operation of parents, in hundreds of families, with his more public and indefatigable labours.

Yet I would caution my hearers against limiting religious instruction to set seasons and solemn occasions. Religion is every day's business; and the principles of it derive a great recommendation from their influence on the varying scenes of life. If, therefore, we would have a well-instructed rising generation to succeed us in the path of human existence, it is highly momentous that religion should be rendered familiar to their daily observation, and that the spirit of that precept of the Mosaic law should be cultivated and exhibited in every christian household—"Thou shalt talk of them," that is, of the principles and precepts of religion, "when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."†

In connexion with these general remarks, I would more particularly observe, that if young people were to have some of the more simple and popular works on the evidences of revelation, with which happily our age and our country abound, put into their hands; if these subjects were frequently introduced in the way of

* This discourse was delivered at Stepney Meeting.

† Deut. vi. 7.

familiar conversation; and, most of all, if they were to be urged, by persuasive kindness, to the daily perusal of the Holy Scriptures; they would find, with the youthful Timothy, that these sacred books are able to impart a wisdom which is unto salvation, and they would be proof against the insinuations of the most artful, and the declamations of the boldest champion of infidelity.

In lamenting, however, the decline of family instruction, I feel it incumbent on me to acknowledge with much delight, as a blessed counterbalance, the increased attention which has been paid in most of our congregations, by the adoption, and by the improved plans of Sabbath schools, to the instruction of the children of the poor. In mentioning the improved plans of these institutions, I refer chiefly to the prominence which is now assigned to religious education. Many of the children in these simple and unpretending seminaries are, I am persuaded, better furnished with just views of the evidences of revelation, and the contents of revelation, than others who can boast of an education more refined, and, in all other respects, more extended. In these schools too there is this obvious advantage. The teachers are generally young people in our respective congregations, who voluntarily take upon themselves the arduous task of imparting knowledge to those whose advantages have been smaller than their own. To do this effectually, they must furnish their own minds with the principles which they wish to communicate. By their inquiries, their reading, and their converse with the children, they become grounded and established in the truths of the gospel, and are "brought to know the certainty of those things, in which they have been instructed," and in which they are instructing others. The children of a well-

conducted Sabbath school, and the teachers who devote themselves to their welfare, are seldom found to swell the vaunted catalogue of the infidel host.

Suffer me, before I quit this momentous part of my subject, to observe, that much, very much, depends on the attention of ministers. By delivering public discourses to the young, by frequently appealing to them in the general course of our ministry, by the formation of plans for their instruction in the evidences and the truths of revelation, and by inuring ourselves to free intercourse with them on these topics, we shall be fortifying their minds against the prevalent errors of the times, and enabling them to render a reason for their hope to every inquirer, and, at all events, we shall be providing them with "the shield of faith, whereby they may oppose and quench the fiery darts of the wicked."

I am happy in thinking that the candidates for the ministry, in our colleges, have now, in the able instructions of their tutors, and in the great variety of important publications on this class of subjects, to which they have access, the most favourable opportunities of familiarizing to their own minds the impregnable grounds which support our most holy faith, and of thus preparing themselves, when they shall be called to the christian ministry, to enter on its various duties as "workmen who need not be ashamed." With no small feeling of delight, we, who have passed the meridian of life, and are rapidly advancing into the shades of the evening, may anticipate the extensive advantages which are preparing for another generation, in the houses of literature and piety which have arisen up among us. And we offer our prayers to the Father of lights, that from each of them, as from holy consecrated fountains, may issue many vital "streams, which may make glad the city of our God."

FOURTHLY,—We shall offer a powerful counteraction to the efforts of infidelity, by a consistent and uniform profession of christianity according to the will of its Divine Author.

It is while christians "continue stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in prayers, that they oppose the most efficient phalanx to both the open attacks and the covert artifices of the infidel. That Christians of all denominations, both Catholic and Protestant, have ably and successfully vindicated christianity from the misrepresentations of its enemies, will be cheerfully and gratefully acknowledged. But charge me not, my respected hearers, with bigotry, if I venture to remark, that Protestant Dissenters, especially when united in the fellowship of the gospel, possess within their own hallowed enclosures, and in their scriptural principles, advantages of the highest order in this great warfare. A civil establishment of christianity presents such potent secular recommendations of the system, as are particularly exposed to infidel objections. There are temptations inseparable from such an institution, to be satisfied with very superficial reasons, for avowing our faith in the gospel. It is the religion of my country—It is patronized by authority—It opens the door, in many instances, to worldly support, to respectability, even to aggrandizement. Such reasons for being christians, are unable to stand against the ridicule which infidelity throws on the religion of Christ as a worldly system. And while opinions are professed, and practices adopted on human authority, which can derive no real support from the Holy Scriptures, even sincere christians will often find it difficult to resist the opposition made to their profession by the sceptic and the unbeliever.

But where a profession of religion rests on no human authority; where its only appeal is "to the law and to the testimony;" where there is a minute concern to be governed by the authority of Christ alone, and to adopt the plans and the discipline of the primitive churches, so far as they are detailed in the inspired records; the mind becomes inured to a consultation of the Scriptures; a growing acquaintance with them is the unavoidable consequence; and that acquaintance furnishes most powerful answers to many specious objections. Those who have been habituated to such employments are seldom found among the converts of infidelity. I am indeed fully aware, that it is not the possession of these advantages alone, but a constant attention to them, and improvement of them to the purposes which they are designed to answer, which will become effectual. There are too many in our congregations, and even in our churches, who are very ignorant of their own principles; and these have sometimes injured themselves, and grieved their friends and their ministers, by turning aside. But it is our mercy, that in the constitution of our societies, and in the observance of the ordinances of the gospel, according to the will of Christ, we have well-adapted means of building up ourselves and others in our most holy faith.

Allow me, then, to recommend a regular and constant attendance on the means of grace; the union of christians in the fellowship of the gospel, promoted and strengthened by the observance of the Lord's Supper; mutual watchfulness over each other, exhorting one another daily; an earnest concern in our associated capacities, to teach the young, to visit the sick, to spread the knowledge of the gospel in the neighbourhood, to unite in promoting the diffusion

of it through our own country, and through the world. To all these purposes, the constitution of our churches is admirably adapted; and we shall by these means, although some of them have little more than an incidental bearing on the subject, be erecting a potent standard against the most crafty and the most imposing efforts of infidelity. These remarks may perhaps be the means of securing in the minds of some young people, a greater degree of attention than they have yet given to the distinguishing principles professed in our churches, and of urging the use of those weapons in the defence of a spiritual kingdom, which properly and exclusively belong to it.

Yet I would be far from insinuating, that all the opposition to infidelity is to be found among the protestant dissenters. — On the contrary, we shall most effectually accomplish the object by being ready, on all occasions, to join with our brethren of every other religious community, in promoting, by *such means*, the perpetuity and diffusion of our common faith.

But the strong holds of the enemy will never be destroyed by opinions which are admitted merely in theory. We must openly avow our attachment to the cause of our Redeemer in the way which he has appointed, and we must "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering." Thus we shall exhibit the gospel in its true character, and shall thereby disarm the enemy of that strength which he has derived from the mistakes and errors of professors. When christians are "not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," in its discoveries and its institutions, they may hope, by such an avowal, to put to silence the opposition of those who understand it not.

FIFTHLY,—Infidelity will be powerfully counteracted, when professing christians exhibit in their temper and character the practical design and influence of the gospel.

The religion of Christ requires not only faith and profession, but obedience—obedience flowing from the heart. If our religion terminate in speculative views, and verbal avowals; although the views, as far as they extend, may be entirely and scripturally accurate, and although the profession may, in its various articles, be such as Christ requires of his disciples, the deficiency will be great and lamentable. It is not wonderful, that such an inefficient kind of religion should confirm the infidel in his opinions, and should rather encourage than subdue the rising objection of the youthful mind. Yet it behoves the unbeliever, and it behoves the unsettled inquirer to know, that in forming their estimate of the gospel from the deficient characters of inconsistent professors, they are doing manifest injustice to the religion of Christ. The tendencies of the religion of the Bible are all holy tendencies. Its requisitions are all holy requisitions. It is full of motive and obligation. And he who is not biassed by the motive and influenced by the obligation, is not, in the scriptural sense of the word, a believer. He has not duly considered what christianity is; he has not credited the sacred testimony in all its bearings; and he has not yielded his heart to its constraining energies.

Brethren, we must be such christians as were the most honourable members of the first churches, if we would perceive the influence of real christianity in withstanding the opposition of the infidel. The energies of the gospel on the character and the life

appear to have been eminently displayed in the Thessalonian christians. With what grateful pleasure does the apostle Paul record the practical influence of the gospel in this distinguished church!—"Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; knowing, brethren beloved," from these fruits, "your election of God." "Ye were examples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia." The consequence was, as he proceeds to state it, "From you sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing." Afterwards, he says, "For this cause thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it, not as the word of men, but as the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." "Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith. For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord." It was from the practical influence of the christian doctrine, on their conversation and conduct, that the gospel proved itself divine.

Now this is a way of defending the gospel, and answering the objections which are raised against it, which is open to every one's use. Without it the most learned arguments in favour of christianity will fail of compassing their design; and where these are absent, it will irresistibly plead the cause of truth and godliness. When it is seen what a mighty influence the vital principles of the gospel have in the prosperous and the adverse scenes of life,—in youth, in mature years, in old age, and in the nearest approaches of death,—the operation of this practical argument will be

largely felt, and the unlettered christian is, by a silent but irresistible eloquence—the eloquence not of words but of actions, proclaiming to all around him, that "faithful saying, worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." It was of this practical appeal in favour of the truth of the gospel, that our blessed Lord spake, when he delivered that finely comprehensive exhortation, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

Before we quit this part of the discourse, let it be just observed, that it is not simply the conduct of christians, which is adapted to produce a conviction of the truth of the gospel; it is the moral transformation which takes place in the character. This often becomes strikingly and irresistibly visible. The intemperate man becomes sober; the cruel man kind; the slothful, diligent and industrious; the proud and self-conceited, humble and diffident.—Now what produces this great change of character? It is instrumentally the faith of the gospel. Before these people knew any thing of christianity, they were walking in sin.—Now they are new creatures.—Surely this change, this visible and observable change of character, could not be produced by a cunningly devised fable. The transformation is of God; and that which was the means of effecting it, can be no other than the word of God.

In other instances, the gentle and less perceptible, but in its effects the equally powerful influence of divine truth on the minds and characters of those who are "drawn with the cords of a man and with bonds of love," speaks the same language, and proves the doctrine which effected it true and divine. "This also cometh forth from the Lord of Hosts, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working."

To these methods of counteracting infidelity, I shall annex but one more.—It is,

SIXTHLY,—The use of humble, believing, persevering prayer.

This is indeed a weapon of defence, which will not be prized by the merely speculative believer; neither will the infidel regard it, but with derision and contempt. But by all whose minds are imbued with the true spirit of the gospel, it will be deemed to possess no small importance in this arduous warfare. When the apostle Paul had enumerated the various parts of the christian armour, which he calls "the whole armour of God," he subjoins this expressive direction, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel.*"—"The weapons of our warfare are mighty through God." While, therefore, all well-adapted means should be sedulously used, it behoves us ever to remember, that for the success of every effort to extirpate error, and to promote the interests of truth, our dependence is on "the Lord, and on the power of his might." The petitions which should be presented at the throne of grace are such as these—That we, and all who are engaged in opposing infidelity, may, in the use of proper means, be divinely assisted—That we may be endowed with wisdom, prudence, fidelity, and zeal—That we may never by unholy conduct be suffered to weaken the force of our own efforts—That by the power, which can alone direct and govern the human mind, each effort may be blessed with success—

* Ephes. vi. 18, 19.

That unbelievers may pause, consider, inquire, and believe—That those who are in danger of being ensnared into error, may be guarded from yielding to temptation---That the minds of the young may be so fortified with knowledge, faith, and piety, that they may be established in the faith as they have been taught; and that, according to the gracious promise of divine inspiration, prejudice, unbelief, and sin may be slain by the testimony of the Holy Scriptures, destroyed by the words of the mouth of God, and destroyed by the brightness of the coming of the Messiah, by the clear display in the gospel of his glory and his grace.

The influence of such prayers may be expected to be very great. If offered in faith, they will be acceptable to God. And they will leave on the heart, from which they ascended, the most salutary impressions; urging every praying christian to labour also, that the end may be attained; and to watch against all hindrances of success in himself and others. But these are petitions, not for the closet only, but for the family. A well-regulated household, accustomed to hear such supplications offered up with frequency, while they surround the domestic altars, will feel an interest in the topic, will inquire into the evidences of religion, and will diligently attend to such methods of counteracting infidelity as have now been suggested. Such, too, may be expected to be the result in a much wider sphere, when petitions of this nature are presented in the public assembly. We have been often, and justly, guarded against *preaching prayers*, against a style of devotion, which is more like an exhortation to men, than the address of sinners to God. But incidentally, prayer is a most powerful method of conveying instruction. We gain much wisdom, and strength, and perseverance, and encouragement from the petitions

which are poured out before God. And the operation of devotional exercises, and still more, of a devotional spirit, in promoting the success of all methods adapted for the advancement of the best interests of mankind, is much greater than is generally supposed. If we pray for the effusion of the Spirit, the Spirit will be poured out. And "until the Spirit be poured from on high," we cannot reasonably expect, that "the desert will become a fruitful field, and the wilderness as the garden of the Lord."

These, my friends, are, in the apprehension of the preacher, "the best methods of counteracting infidelity." He presumes not to say, that they are the only methods. Others, subordinate to these, may be used. Indeed, the more carefully we cultivate the ground with religious principles,—the more christian knowledge is circulated, and the more genuine piety is pursued,—the less formidable will the opposition of infidelity become; until at length, with every other description of opposition, it shall sink away and perish; and "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

If, on a review of the particulars now considered, it should be inquired, what results may be expected to arise, I would answer,

1. It is not too much to expect, that some infidels will be converted to the faith of the gospel.

Opportunities of doing good have frequently been lost, through the influence of an apprehension, that no good is likely to arise from the effort,—but, "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" There have been instances of success, not perhaps very many, but sufficiently numerous to sanction and encourage every attempt to produce in minds which have been prejudiced against the truth of the gospel, a firm conviction

that it is of good; such a conviction as shall lead them, not only to a speculative acknowledgment of its divine origin, but to a cordial compliance with its great demands, to "believe with all the heart." Men of science and literature, who had despised christianity in whole or in part, have been led on evidence to embrace it: and those who have filled lower departments in life, and have been misled by the popular appeals made to them in opposition to the religion of the Bible, have been prevailed on to read and inquire, and eventually to receive the truth in the love of it. Other instances will doubtless occur. We may hope for them, by God's blessing, on the plans now in operation. They will become immensely more numerous, as the time approaches when the triumphs of the gospel will be universal, and "all flesh shall see the salvation of our God."

2. We may confidently hope, that in thus counteracting infidelity, we shall be instrumental in establishing the faith, and increasing the number of the disciples of Christ.

Our young people will attain that important design for which Luke wrote his gospel, and addressed it to Theophilus:—"they will know the certainty of those things wherein they have been instructed." Inquirers will be directed into the truth; and those who had imbibed some rising prejudices against the gospel, will see and acknowledge that it is "the power of God unto salvation." The measures which have been now recommended, while they oppose infidelity, can scarcely fail of producing happy effects in the scenes out of which they arise. And as missionary exertions for the conversion of the heathen have given birth to numerous labours for the advancement of religion at home, so it may well be expected, that in aiming at

the annihilation of infidelity, we shall be extending and perpetuating the kingdom of Christ.

3. The gospel will be proved to be true and divine by the fulfilment of its own predictions.

The extension of the Redeemer's empire over the minds of men,—not by the sword of power or of state—not by the prosecution of infidels, or by annexing secular advantages to the profession of christianity—not by any carnal weapons, but by manifestation of the truth—by the armour of righteousness—by methods addressed to the understanding, the heart, and the conscience, will present to the admiring world an unanswerable proof that it comes from God. When "the Lord shall send the rod of his strength out of Zion;" when "his people," numerous as "the dewdrops of the morning, shall be made willing in the day of his power;" it shall then be increasingly manifest, that the doctrine of a crucified Redeemer, which was of old to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness, but which is the central point of the gospel revelation, is indeed "the wisdom of God, and the power of God." Thus will the progress of christianity be increased by its own energies, and the spiritual kingdom will be enlarged, until "THE SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD" shall be the appropriate title of the Son of God.

In concluding this discourse, I may be permitted plainly and briefly to address several classes of my hearers.

To Ministers and Students, and more especially directing my thoughts to the latter description, I would affectionately recommend the duty of making themselves largely acquainted with the best methods of defending christianity from the opposition of infidels.

If, my young brethren, any of you should be assailed

by a disciple of infidelity, and he should ask what reason you have to believe in the authenticity and inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, be prepared so to reply, that he may perceive you are not uninformed on the subject, and that if he would give it impartial attention, he may be induced to receive that faith which he had laboured to destroy. A minister should likewise be qualified to instruct those, whose advantages for religious inquiry have been less extended than his own in the ground of our most holy faith. And a candidate for the ministry should, by cultivating a large acquaintance with the evidence of revelation, and the best works which have issued from the press on this great subject, prepare himself for diffusing, in the circle which he may be called to fill, whatever it may be, the information which he is daily labouring to acquire.

I cannot forbear congratulating my junior brethren on the superior advantages to which they are admitted in this day of enlarged inquiry, on this and every important topic which comes under consideration.—Happy will they be, if they duly avail themselves of these advantages. They will then come forth into the ministry of the gospel, workmen that need not to be ashamed.

To the Members of our churches, I would merely say, Labour and pray, to establish your own minds, and the minds of each other, in the grounds and principles of our most holy faith, that "when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord may lift up a standard against him.

The young people of our several congregations, I would earnestly intreat to read, and inquire impartially and seriously on this all-important topic, and especially, to "search the Scriptures," for they carry their own witness with them, and suggest the best means of

defending their claims to the character of a revelation from God.

The hesitating and undecided, I would caution against being misled by the specious objections of the unbeliever. It would be well for persons in this unhappy state of mind, to converse freely with some minister, or some other well-informed and pious christian friend, who might probably be able, in the simplest and most effectual way, to detect the fallacy of the argument, and to lead the inquirer into the way of truth.

And O, how strongly would I call on those, who are endeavouring to satisfy themselves with a form of godliness, in the neglect of its power. You little consider, that you are promoting the triumphs of infidelity, more perhaps, than any other class. If Christianity be true, you must be awfully wrong. "To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts. We beseech you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

Finally.—Be comforted and congratulated, Christians, on the prospects opening to you in the prophetic Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments, of the progress of the gospel—The conversion of the heathen—The restoration of the Jews—The annihilation of infidelity—The universal reign of the Messiah—And at length, the glory and blessedness of the heavenly world, where "we shall see as we are seen, and know as we are known." Amen.

LECTURE XII.

ON THE MYSTERIES OF REVELATION.

By JOSEPH FLETCHER, M.A.

"The prerogative of God comprehends the whole man; wherefore, as we are to obey his law, though we find a reluctation in our will, so we are to believe his word, though we find a reluctation in our reason: for, if we believe only that which is agreeable unto our reason, we give assent to the matter, not to the Author, which is no more than we do towards a suspected and discredited witness." BACON.

"The mystery is as great in Nature, as in Christianity." BUTLER.

LECTURE XII.

ON THE MYSTERIES OF REVELATION.

PSALM CXXXIX. 6.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it!

SUCH was the devout exclamation of the Psalmist, when describing in all the sublimity of inspiration, the omnipresence of God. On the strongest evidence he was assured of the reality of that omnipresence; from the contemplation of it he derived the most salutary impressions; and he felt its practical influence to be of the highest importance. But when he attempted to comprehend the nature of this divine perfection, his mind was lost and overwhelmed in the immensity of the subject! Similar emotions are excited by the consideration of other facts and principles of revelation, and on this account we term them *mysterious*. To shew the grounds of that authority which demands and justifies our cordial admission of these incomprehensible verities, and to illustrate their peculiar character, are, I apprehend, the immediate objects of the present discourse. I feel, my respected brethren, the magnitude of the subject, and the responsibility involved in its discussion. Oh! that I may not "darken

believing those doctrines; so that there is an actual progression in the perception and the force of such evidence proportioned to the degree in which the mind is imbued with the spirit and principles of the system. Other parts of the evidence are obviously separable from the principles which they are designed to authenticate; and a man therefore may formally admit the one, and actually reject the other. He may confound the admission of the evidence with the reception of the doctrine, and thus practise on himself the most dangerous deception. He may even be an advocate for that evidence, and by a well-compacted course of argumentation produce the most powerful and beneficial impression on the minds of others; and yet all the while he may never enter the recesses of that spiritual temple, whose exterior construction he may so much admire and vindicate. He may never approach the throne and the altar of the hidden sanctuary; he may deny, or attempt to annihilate all that is sacred and peculiar in the constitution of that sanctuary; and while professedly defending its outward fortifications, may be virtually, and in the tendencies of his system, undermining the foundations of the edifice itself!

Such a state of mind is a melancholy proof of the insufficiency of external attestations to effect the renovation of the heart. We know from the records of scripture, that the actual witnessing of miracles, not only failed in some cases to produce conviction, but in other instances, by producing only the belief of the miracles, left such believers in the same moral state in which it found them. We are not to infer from these facts, that the exhibition of such evidence is unnecessary, whether disregarded altogether, or defective as to its practical impression. There is

enough in the slightest portion of it, to warrant the most cordial reception of the truth, and to excite the most anxious solicitude in reference to its claims. If the light shining on the darkness be not "apprehended," its own value is not on that account diminished. Obligation is the necessary result of its exhibition; and most solemn is the responsibility it involves. "For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which began at the first to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?"

If the evidence in favour of Christianity is thus established, and responsibility is proportioned to the degree of that evidence, then it follows, that a revelation attested by such an immense expenditure of proof must possess *authority* in reference to all its principles and requisitions. By *authority*, I mean — *the right of dictation on all subjects within the range of its decisions.* This right of dictation necessarily results from the established divinity of the record. It is the connexion of inspiration with its genuineness and authenticity which constitutes the ground of authority. A miracle is the disarrangement of the known laws of nature; no power merely human could effect it; the God of truth would never endorse a falsehood. If therefore the message or instruction in question is authenticated by such proofs, and the characters of divinity are impressed on the communication; then I feel, that such an instructor is not only entitled to my credence, on the ground of the truth which he announces, but his testimony *demands* my cordial and immediate reception. I am under the strongest moral obligation to receive it; it is at my peril if I reject it!

"If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater;" and "he who believeth not, maketh God a liar!"

The fact of a revelation having been made, clearly implies the previous necessity of such a revelation. If human reason had been adequate to the discovery of its principles, a supernatural disclosure would have been superfluous. But admit that necessity, (and the most decisive facts and reasonings might be adduced to prove it,)—and in such circumstances, the slightest intimation of a divine announcement, where only rational probability attached to the proof, would be sufficient to demand an immediate reception. The obligation in such a case would be the greater, on the supposition, that the beings to whom it was addressed, were in a state of moral defection and apostacy. Supposing this announcement to have been in some respects obscure and indefinite, if it clearly enjoined some specific exercise of faith and obedience, and distinctly stated, that what was then dark and incomprehensible would be hereafter explained, would it not be the obvious dictate of reason to such beings, to yield instant and cheerful submission to the divine communication? This would be the case if the evidence of such a communication were of the most simple character. But let us reflect on the record actually before us,—a record, bringing with it, by the lapse of time, a constantly progressive accumulation of argument in its favour;—a record, exhibiting a series of remarkable communications, commencing with the earliest existence of our race, harmonising with each other amidst the revolutions of ages, and furnishing the most satisfactory data for the solution of various questions respecting the history of man, and the appearances of our globe;—a record, presenting the

sublimest disclosure of the character of God—the justest delineation of human nature—the most powerful inducements to virtue—the most effective counteractions to vice;—a record, unfolding the most glorious prospects, inspiring the most animating hopes, and exerting an influence on individuals and communities, wherever its principles are received, which raises them from degradation and misery, and fits them for "glory, honour, and immortality!" Surely, such a record, attested by infallible proofs, exhibiting traces of its origin in every page, confirmed by evidence growing out of itself and becoming more clear and refulgent the more entirely we imbibe its spirit and are conformed to its dictates, that provides for all the exigencies of our nature, and throws over the checquered and gloomy scenes of time the radiance of heavenly consolations, must be authoritative and divine—"THE WORD OF GOD WHICH LIVETH AND ENDURETH FOR EVER!"

What then are the dispositions of mind which we ought to bring to the examination of such a record? Having previously satisfied ourselves as to its pretensions, how ought we to conduct the investigation of its contents? This question brings the entire reasoning of these preliminary remarks to the subject before us, and suggests the best principles for guiding us to a satisfactory conclusion. Let us suppose, that instead of a record, preserved from age to age, by means securing its genuine transmission, we had the oral instruction of some messenger from heaven, who embodied in his character all the attributes requisite to secure our reverence and our confidence. Suppose that this teacher were accessible to us, and that his announcements on the great verities of religion were precisely and literally accordant with what this record

contains. Suppose that in the same style of assertion and testimony, he stated every point which it was necessary for us to believe; and that, proceeding to some principles of a peculiar character, we found ourselves inclined to go beyond the actual range of his communication, and to ask for explanations. I will imagine that these explanations might be requested without any violation of the diffidence and modesty which would become a sincere lover of truth; and that after listening to our inquiry, we had received an answer to this effect,—"WAIT,—implicit deference is due to a divine testimony; faith honours that testimony, by trusting the veracity of the reporter. If you believe only what you comprehend, it is not so much an act of faith, rendering homage to the authority of the testifier, as an act of confidence in your own powers of discernment and comprehension. THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH!"

Were this the actual substance of an answer from a living oracle, it ought to meet every practical difficulty; because no ground for confidence in any known laws of consciousness, sense, or ratiocination, can be stronger than the reason for believing what is asserted by a divine instructor. The principle on which such an appeal is founded, is most suited to the present state of probation, and the great moral purposes for which a revelation is made; it is most consonant with just views of the nature, dependance, and responsibility of man; and it is most conducive to his preparation for that higher state of existence which awaits the faithful, amidst the splendours and discoveries of eternity.

Our present inquiry respects the "Mysteries of Revelation;" and I shall attempt to prove,

I. THAT THERE ARE FACTS AND PRINCIPLES ANNOUNCED IN THE SACRED VOLUME WHICH MAY BE PROPERLY TERMED THE MYSTERIES OF REVELATION: and,

II. THAT THESE MYSTERIES OF REVELATION ILLUSTRATE AND CONFIRM ITS DIVINE AUTHORITY.

I. It is in the first place to be proved, THAT THERE ARE MYSTERIES IN THE REVELATION WITH WHICH GOD HAS FAVOURED US. The term "mystery," in its primary acceptation, means *a secret;* and in this sense it is frequently applied in the Scriptures. Certain arrangements of the divine purpose, either obscurely intimated, or veiled in parabolic illustrations, are called "*the mysteries* of the kingdom of heaven." The accession of the Gentiles to the church of God, under the gospel dispensation, is described as "the mystery hid" in the mind of God. In these and similar passages the word might be rendered "secret," or "secrets." They had been concealed from the knowledge of men until a divine revelation made them known. From this primary sense of the term, it became applied to those exhibitions of divine truth, which were conveyed under symbolic or figurative representations. Hence the apocalyptic symbols beheld by the Apostle John are described as "mysteries*." From this use of the word it was transferred to those rites and institutions of religion which were considered of a symbolical character. It must however be confessed, that for the ecclesiastical application of the term there is no authority in the New Testament; and its use has no doubt been rendered subservient to the corrupt domination of the Roman hierarchy. In its theological acceptation it is applied to those

* Rev. i. 20. xvii. 5.

principles of revelation, which are in the present state of our knowledge considered to be incomprehensible. This is the established use of the term, and there are several passages in the apostolic writings which appear to justify this acceptation. The apostle Paul, in his Epistle to Timothy, enjoins the "holding fast *the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience,*" (1 Tim. iii. 9;) and in the same chapter he declares, that "without controversy," or confessedly, great is "*the mystery of godliness,*" (iii. 16.) Now the various parts of this mystery are distinctly stated to consist in certain principles and facts of the Christian revelation, which are evidently described as characteristic of the entire system; which are known only because they are revealed; and which, though revealed, are still marked by their incomprehensibility.* If those parts

* "By this remarkable term ('the *mystery* of godliness') we are bound, I conceive, to understand *some part of the Christian doctrine, which is far above the dictates and anticipations of the human mind, and which when revealed is not fully comprehended.* If we believe that He 'who was manifested in the flesh' is indeed 'over all, God blessed for ever,' we have that which answers to the description, and we have a parallel to our Lord's own assertion, 'No man knoweth the Son but the Father.'" *Dr. J. P. Smith's "Scripture Testimony to the Messiah,"* Vol. II. Book iv. p. 702.

Dr. Campbell, in his Dissertation on the term *mystery*, contends, that in this, as well as in other places, it means "secret," and thus paraphrases the passage: "Great unquestionably is the divine secret of which our religion brings the discovery: God was manifest in the flesh," &c. The Doctor confesses that it might be plausibly urged, that the term here denotes "something, which though revealed, is inexplicable;" but he contends that it ought not to receive a different interpretation. His paraphrastic version, however, is by no means satisfactory, nor will it apply to the facts stated in the passage. The term "secret" implies the previous existence of the thing before the discovery; but in what sense, conformable to this interpretation, could it be said that Christ's being "seen of angels, justified in the Spirit, received up into glory,"

of the Christian economy are termed *mysteries,* which had been *secrets* concealed in the divine purpose,

were "secrets of which our religion brings the discovery?" These were facts known and attested by indubitable evidence long before the apostle wrote this passage; and yet he represents them, notwithstanding their disclosure, as being still—"the mystery." The remark applies with still greater force to the first great fact specified in this assemblage—the manifestation of God in the flesh. Whatever be the correct reading of the text, the argument as to the meaning of the word "mystery" is unaffected by it. On the other hand, if it be considered as designating some property in the principles of revelation, which rendered them, after all that had been disclosed, *incomprehensible,* the passage is at once intelligible and consistent. The apostle, in his Epistle to the Corinthians (1 Epist. xiii. 2.) supposes a man to understand *all mysteries,* and yet be without charity. If by "mysteries" be meant only "secrets which had been discovered to us," there appears to be, on that supposition, no extraordinary attainment necessary. But if the apostle meant such truths as are generally considered beyond our comprehension, his language is natural and obvious. I am inclined to think, that in all the apostle's uses of this term, as applied to the Christian revelation, he meant to denote something either astonishing or incomprehensible; so that in each case the announcement of a mystery was designed to excite grateful surprise and holy admiration. The passage in 1 Cor. xv. 51, is remarkably illustrative of this supposition.

It is obvious, however, that the precise meaning of the term *mystery* by no means affects the general argument involved in the reasonings of this discourse. "The question," as *Dr. Wardlaw* justly observes, in his admirable *Reply to Mr. Yates,* "is about the belief of mysteries in the *ordinary* sense of the term. It is in this sense that the word is used, when Unitarians object to the articles of Trinitarian faith, on the ground of their mysteriousness. The controversy is not about names but about things. Let the sense of mystery be what it may in the New Testament writings, will the particular use of the term there at all prove, that there is actually nothing in any of the doctrines revealed, that is mysterious in the common acceptation of it? Is it not the simple matter of inquiry, whether we are called to believe mysteries in this sense of the word; that is, to believe in things that are difficult to be understood, or incomprehensible?"

or obscurely announced, surely other disclosures of the infinite mind, in reference to principles which "it never entered the heart of man to conceive" till God had revealed them by his Spirit, might with the utmost propriety be termed *mysteries*—mysteries not only because unknown till their discovery, but because when discovered, still, in certain views and aspects, amongst the *arcana* of the Most High! If it be asked, how can they be termed the mysteries of *revelation?* I answer, that it is possible for a revelation to contain discoveries which may in some respects be clear and explicit, and yet in other respects may be in the strictest sense mysterious. Facts may be asserted, relations may be stated, agencies may be described; and of those facts, relations, and agencies, we may have a sufficiently definite conception, for all the purposes for which they are announced. Yet along with these discoveries, there may be assertions and statements which in the present state of our faculties may be inexplicable. The nature of a subject, or the mode of an operation, may be altogether uncomprehended by us, while the existence of the subject, and the reality of the operation, may be distinctly announced and clearly perceived. "Many things," says that acute and judicious reasoner, President Edwards, "concerning the nature of what is revealed may be clear, though many other things concerning their nature may be hid. God requires us to understand no more than is intelligibly revealed. That which is not distinctly revealed, we are not required distinctly to understand. It may be necessary to know a thing in part, and yet not necessary for us to know it perfectly."*

* Edwards's Miscellaneous Observations. Works, Vol. VIII. p. 280.

The discoveries of revelation may be pronounced mysterious, when either our information is limited, or our minds are incapable of fully comprehending the subject. The term is therefore relative both to the extent of our knowledge and the degree of our mental capability. Of each source of mysteriousness there are numerous illustrations.

The entrance of moral evil into our world by the machination of an apostate spirit, and its existence in any part of the universe under the government of a wise, powerful and holy Being—who hates it, who could have prevented it, and who has not chosen to prevent it, for reasons, which must from the nature of things be just,—are facts which cannot be denied, but which are in the strictest sense mysterious! We know that sin exists; we know that it could not exist without the divine permission; we know, from the infinite rectitude of the divine nature, that in no sense which is inconsistent with the moral attributes of the Deity, can he be its author; and we are persuaded that there must be reasons worthy of his wisdom and benevolence for that permission. But these reasons are not distinctly revealed. They are amongst the "secret things which belong to the Lord." Here let it not be said, that because the arcana of heaven, on this point, are not revealed, therefore nothing can be believed; for our ignorance as to the general subject is not absolute but partial. We are not ignorant of the facts, that moral evil exists, and that God is infinitely holy. We may legitimately reason from these facts, and derive conclusions, both speculative and practical, of high importance, from the reasonings by which they are respectively supported. But we do not perceive the links in the great chain of truth by which they are united. We know that they

must be harmonious with each other; but our not perceiving the connexion, does not affect their reality, though it is the cause of our pronouncing the subject mysterious. Had it pleased the Most High to assign the reasons of his procedure, I do not see that we should have been incapable of understanding them; but the silence as well as the voice of scripture is designed to teach us the most useful instructions. "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight!"

The foreknowledge of God and the responsibility of man are facts which we most firmly and tenaciously maintain. Evidence which cannot be resisted, may be adduced in support of each; and he who would deny the one or the other, would either undeify the Creator, or brutalise the creature. But after all the speculations and hypotheses which ingenious thinkers have formed, in order to ascertain their agreement, we invariably find, instead of a clear analysis, or a satisfactory solution, that the Gordian knot is *cut*, and the difficulty of the question is evaded! But because this difficulty is felt—because "shadows, clouds, and darkness," rest upon that path which "the vulture's eye hath not traced"—shall we doubt these first principles of the oracles of God?—"God forbid—let God be true and every man a liar!"

I might proceed to similar illustrations founded on the admitted principles of what is termed *natural* religion, as well as on the discoveries of revelation. I might particularly specify the *determinations* of the *divine sovereignty*, "the good pleasure of the will of God," as affording a proof that what is in one sense clearly revealed, may yet, from our limited knowledge of the subject, be *mysterious*. We know that God has established a system of moral government; that that government is founded on wise and holy laws; that

by the violation of those laws, the guilty are exposed to the righteous displeasure of the Most High; that in every instance, and to all the extent in which justice takes its course, "the Judge of the earth will do right." But HE, who is not bound by any principle of equity to relieve the guilty from the consequences of that condition, into which they are brought by voluntary transgression, has actually provided a way of recovery; and all its applications and results, in every instance that can possibly exist, must, from the necessary perfection of the divine nature, be predetermined and arranged in the purposes of the infinite mind. But the reasons of the divine procedure, whether considered in reference to the external dispensation of mercy, or to its peculiarity of operation on the individuals who are the subjects of that mercy, we are totally unable to ascertain. It is evident that this mysteriousness affects the peculiarity of the operation as much as the peculiarity of the purpose; nor will the denial of the purpose, in the slightest degree, diminish or remove it. If there be any exertion of power, by which one is made to "differ from another," and by virtue of which, such a difference in character is produced, that the future destiny of the individual is actually determined by it, then the procedures of the day of judgment, as far as our present anticipations are concerned, appear as mysterious as the antecedent arrangements of the eternal purpose.

In these and similar cases, we feel that the immediate reason of mysteriousness, is the partial disclosure of the information necessary to our clear understanding of the subject. We have indeed general declarations of the wisdom, rectitude, and benevolence of the Most High; and we are assured, that the mani-

festation of his own glory will be the just, as it is the proper and the intended result of all his administration. But shall we deny the truths involved in these facts and principles, because we cannot fully understand them? Let us listen to that voice which is heard from behind the dark cloud of the divine dispensations, saying to us,—"What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."—"BE STILL, AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD!"

But I proceed to consider illustrations of this mysteriousness, in other classes of scriptural truth. There are subjects which, irrespective of the limited and partial information of the divine testimony, and notwithstanding the disclosure of their reality as facts, are still incomprehensible as principles. They are incomprehensible, in consequence of their remoteness from all the subjects that come within the range of our cognizance and our perceptions. To this class, indeed, some of the first principles of religion belong; those principles which are never called in question, by such as deny what are termed the mysteries of Christianity, though surrounded with the same impenetrable obscurity. It is not unusual to speak of the *Eternity*, the *Self-existence*, the *Omnipresence* of the divine nature, as principles of natural religion. If by this phrase it is meant, that they could have been ascertained by the unaided operations of the human intellect, or discovered without some actual communication from the Deity, no position is more unwarranted, or more contrary to fact. It would not be difficult to prove, that *Revelation* alone is the true source of all the ideas conveyed by these terms; that no self-originating processes of reason ever led to their discovery; that they formed the subjects of divine instruction to the first inhabitants of our world; that

oral tradition, for a series of ages, preserved the knowledge of them; that in proportion as these primary notices of truth were obscured or defaced, either by the lapse of time, or removal from the early scenes of revelation, and men were left to the uncontrolled tendencies and reasonings of their own mind, so far were they from evincing a capability of having originated them, that they could not perpetuate them, and did not "like to retain them," and actually framed their monstrous systems of polytheism and idolatry in direct hostility to all these original communications.* On this account a *written* revelation was employed, as the principal medium of divine instruction, and it is to this source, directly or indirectly accessible, that all just conceptions of the natural and moral perfections of the Deity must be traced. But who ever comprehended, with distinctness or adequacy, these acknowledged attributes of the infinite mind?

* The following passage, from a sermon by DR. WARDLAW, contains a most eloquent and impressive illustration of the divine testimony, concerning this awful process:—"The fancy of sceptical philosophy, that *polytheism* was the first religion of mankind, is as opposite to reason and as inconsistent with facts, as it is contrary to the express dictates of the Bible. From *this* book we learn that in Paradise God was known in his true character, and was worshipped 'in spirit and in truth.' But soon, alas! the scene was changed. '*They changed the truth of God into a lie.*' Every view that can be taken of the worship of idols is *a lie* against the supreme majesty. Their number, is a lie against his unity; their corporeal nature, is a lie against his pure invisible spirituality; their confined and local residence, a lie against his omnipresence and immensity; their limited and subdivided departments of operation, a lie against his universal proprietorship and dominion; their follies and weaknesses, a lie against his infinite wisdom; their defects and vices and crimes, a lie against his unsullied purity and perfection. In what a strange unhallowed state must that man's heart be, who can contemplate, without emotion, this universal slander upon the character of Deity!"—*Dr. Wardlaw's Missionary Sermon.*

After all that Revelation has announced, and Reason, in her sublimest excursion has attained, He dwells in "unapproachable light;" and "none, by searching, can find out God!"

Those parts of revelation which are in the highest sense mysterious, are such as respect the *nature of the divine essence, and the distinctions subsisting in that essence; the nature of divine influence, and its operation on the human mind; and the nature of our existence in a future state.*

(i.) The unity of God is one of the peculiar discoveries of revelation. To counteract the fatal tendencies of the human mind to polytheism, and to perpetuate the knowledge and impression of this great principle, patriarchs were called to be pilgrims and strangers on earth; the Hebrews were selected as the depositaries of the divine will; numerous statutes were enacted, various prohibitions were enjoined, and rites and ceremonies were appointed, to render them in all their private, domestic, and civil usages, a *peculiar people.* To keep them from idolatry, to preserve the doctrine of the divine unity, and to enforce the practical obligations it involved, were amongst the special objects of the Mosaic dispensation. Prophets were also raised up, during a long succession of ages, to instruct the people on this subject; and while the ultimate bearing of their predictions respected the advent, character, and reign of the Messiah, their writings abound in the most impassioned denunciations of every thing tending to idolatry. Never are they so vehement, so severe, so awfully sublime, or so powerfully caustic in their appeals and descriptions, as when they advert to this important subject. In the Christian revelation we meet with equally decisive declarations respecting the evil of idolatry in every possible form,

and the proper and essential unity of the divine nature. To the influence of this revelation alone can we ascribe the fact of the established prevalence of that doctrine which respects the unity of God. All that reason can infer from the harmony of the universe, is a unity of counsel and design. The rejecters of the mysteries of religion, and the deifiers of human reason, are solely indebted to this sacred book for this, as well as every other portion of truth, both in their systems of ethics and of theology. Their own torch, feeble as is its glimmering, they have lighted at the altar of revelation.

But while the doctrine of the divine unity is thus clearly revealed, it is for those who admit the authority of revelation, and deny its mysteries, to account for the fact, that a book thus distinct in its annunciation of the truth, and its solemn reprobation of all the tendencies to polytheistic principles, should have led the pious Jews of ancient times, and the successive millions of the Christian world, for eighteen centuries, to believe in the *plurality of certain subsistences in the unity of the Divine Nature.* I say nothing about persons or hypostases—creeds and formularies—ingenious speculations, or metaphysical distinctions; but, without inquiring about the truth or the error of these matters, I ask simply, how is it that it should have been believed by the Christian church in every age, that, while God is One, there are nevertheless such peculiarities in that unity, that "the Word manifest in the flesh is *God,*" and the "Spirit the Comforter is *God;*" *each* and *alike* entitled to all the attributes and prerogatives of absolute and underived divinity, in connexion with such a relation to each other as still preserves the essential *oneness* of the godhead?

The proof of these declarations is not to be found

in any systematic or scholastic explanations; but in the separate inductions of evidence, which are supported by a careful investigation of the import of the divine records. If, while these records assert the unity of God, they also assert with equal explicitness that HE who appeared on earth as the *Messiah,* "in the form of a servant and the fashion of a man," is possessed of the attributes and designation of Deity; that HE who is called "the *Spirit*" is also possessed of the same divine perfections; if it be clear that these are not various representations of one subsistence, but representations conveying the ideas of distinctness and separate operation, existing in one nature; the question then is, am I to reject the assertions of Scripture, and the fair and legitimate inferences supported by those assertions, because I am not able to comprehend the *mode* by which plurality and unity are combined? With human terms and explanations I have nothing to do in this inquiry. They may or may not be supported by scriptural principles; they may or may not be compendious abbreviations of complex propositions and proper conventional symbols of certain admitted ideas, which the refinements of error, or the subtleties of controversy, might render both expedient and necessary. But whatever use be made of these terms and explanations, I conceive the great questions are—Do the Scriptures assert the proper Deity of the Son, and the proper Deity of the Holy Spirit? Shall we, in order to maintain our ideas of the divine unity, and because of the *mysteriousness* of combining unity with plurality, deny or explain away that plurality? or shall we admit *both;* and, receiving the testimony of revelation on the ground of its own authority, await the disclosures and explanations of a higher state of existence?

(ii.) The doctrine of divine influence on the human mind is most explicitly asserted in the Sacred Volume; but whether its operations be regarded as ordinary or extraordinary, we feel ourselves altogether incapable of comprehending the *mode* of its communication. We have the highest authority for thus considering it. The Saviour himself, in his memorable conference with Nicodemus, after asserting the necessity of that spiritual renovation which is essential to our admission to the kingdom of heaven, was asked by the Jewish ruler—"How can a man be born when he is old?" Our Lord, in replying to that inquiry, illustrates the nature of the Spirit's influence by alluding to the mysterious operation of the "wind." "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." (John iii. 8.) This illustration clearly proves that there may be undoubted evidence of an agency operating, while the manner of its operation may be either unknown or inexplicable. It is also worthy of your notice, that, in connexion with this very illustration, our Lord most decisively intimates that *principles, far transcending the comprehension of the human intellect, and yet requiring a full and instantaneous admission, would be advanced and maintained by himself.*

I beg your special attention to the passage, John iii. 9—13. "Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe,

if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven." The inquiry of Nicodemus expressed both his surprise and his incredulity. The subject was new; he had never studied it before; he was not conscious of the necessity of the influence described; and our Lord's answer contains the following important sentiments.

1. *That the doctrine of regeneration had been taught under the Old Testament economy.* Had it been a new doctrine, taught only by the Messiah, and never before communicated, it could not have been surprising that Nicodemus should have been ignorant of it. Our Lord's inquiry supposes that he might have known it, and intimates that he ought to have known it.

2. *That his testimony, as the Messiah, was entitled to an immediate and implicit reception.* The Saviour was persuaded of the truth of his own declarations. Some suppose that he uses the plural term, to denote that he united the testimony of John the Baptist with his own; others, that he adverts to the *Spirit*, whose *witness* was coincident with his own: but there is no reason for either supposition. Nothing is more common than to use such a form of speech when asserting great and fundamental principles. It is, however, evident, that our Lord designed to impress on the mind of the Jewish Rabbi, the sentiment THAT HE to whose miracles he had referred, as a proof of his divine commission, was not an ordinary teacher; that no reasoning in favour of any given principle, according to the ordinary forms of argument, could be equal in force and authority to the mere declaration of an instructor thus divinely accredited; and that whether

he, as such an instructor, assigned the *rationale* of a sentiment or not, there was the fullest ground for implicit confidence in his declaration, "We speak that we do know." Hence the Saviour intimates,

3. *That if the doctrines of the Old Testament dispensation were in any degree incomprehensible, the discoveries of the New Economy were to be marked by a still higher character of mysterious sublimity.* This appears to me the natural sense of the 12th and 13th verses. By the "earthly things," our Lord meant, the things revealed under the existing dispensation. He did not mean the illustration he had drawn from the "wind," to explain the influence of his Spirit, because such "earthly things" no one ever doubted; but he meant the particular doctrine, the nature and importance of which Nicodemus might have gathered from the Old Testament Scriptures. The language of the apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, (xii. 28.) is strikingly confirmatory of this exposition.

By "heavenly things," our Lord meant the things of that new dispensation which he came to establish. And thus that economy might be appropriately designated, to point out the dignity of its author, the grandeur of its discoveries, the spirituality of its character, and the permanence of its duration. Hence we find our Lord, in this very connexion, asserting facts respecting his own divinity and atonement, which Nicodemus must have perceived to be of the sublimest and most mysterious character. No inference can be more natural or more obvious than this, *that mysterious truths might be expected to be announced by such a Teacher; and that, mysterious as they were, his authority is a sufficient reason for their credibility, and a sufficient ground for their cordial reception.*

(iii.) No subject is more confounding or mysterious than that which respects *death*. We know what are its precursors, its accompaniments, and its consequences. But what becomes of the spirit which, a few moments before, animated that deserted tenement? Does it exist at all? Is it conscious or unconscious? If in a state of consciousness, how are its operations conducted? Will the body rise again? If there be a resurrection, what will constitute the identity of that body; and what will be its properties? My friends, to all these questions, the oracle of reason returns no answer. Shadows, clouds, and darkness surround the inquirer, and not one ray of light has ever passed across the gloom, to afford solid consolation to the agitated mind. Revelation alone resolves the inquiries, and directs us to JESUS and THE RESURRECTION. The gospel lights the torch of hope in "the valley of the shadow of death," and throws its cheering radiance on the scenes of the future world.—But are there no *mysteries* in these announcements? While the facts and the evidence of the facts, are clearly before us, are there no incomprehensible declarations? Our Divine Teacher has indeed assured us of the "mansions in the house of his Father," and has said—"if it were not so, I would have told you;" and we know that "what eye never saw, nor ear heard, nor ever entered into the heart of man to conceive, of the things which God hath prepared for them that love him, God hath revealed to us by his Spirit:"—Yet, notwithstanding this revelation, even these facts are represented as "THE DEEP THINGS OF GOD," known only to the mind of the infinite and omniscient Spirit! To shew the perfect compatibility of such a revelation with mysteriousness, we hear one of the apostles, who had been favoured with the most intimate fellowship

with the Redeemer, who had beheld his glory on the Mount, his agony in the Garden, who had witnessed the sublimest manifestations of his dignity, and had been overwhelmed by the splendour of his majesty, in the visions of Patmos—we hear him exclaim—"*It doth not yet appear what we shall be!*" 1 John iii. 1.

In this respect apostles as well as ourselves lived by FAITH. Even *their* faculties, enriched as they were by heavenly discoveries, and strengthened by the vigour of inspiration, could not comprehend the nature of the glory to be revealed: and after all that sanctified imagination can conceive, or revealed testimony can impart, we are compelled to regard the information of Scripture, with all its fulness of illustration, and all its glowing imagery, and all its adaptation to the great purposes of instruction and consolation, as among things unsearchable, and to rejoice, that what from our weakness and our ignorance we "*know not now, we shall know hereafter!*"

I proceed to shew,

II. THAT THESE MYSTERIES OF REVELATION, SO FAR FROM PRESENTING A VALID OBJECTION TO ITS CLAIMS, ILLUSTRATE AND CONFIRM ITS DIVINE AUTHORITY.

For, in the first place, *they are not contradictions, nor do they present any thing opposed to the dictates of right reason.*

Reason sometimes means, the abstract nature and fitness of things—that which is the basis of all truth: and to assert that any given principle is opposed to reason in this sense, can be proved only by shewing, that there is no evidence for it in any of those grounds of belief, or media of knowledge, by which the

perceptions and convictions of the human mind are determined. In this view of the term, such an assertion amounts to nothing more than the *denial* of the peculiar principles of Christianity. But denying them to be true, is not proving them to be false; it is only assuming the thing to be proved. *Reason* is also applied to that intellectual faculty by which we discern the agreement or disagreement of terms in any given proposition. In some cases the agreement or disagreement is perceived at once, and we describe such an exercise of the faculty as intuition. In other cases we employ the intervention of ideas already possessed; we go through a process more or less extended in order to determine that agreement or disagreement. We make use of the knowledge already acquired in order to extend our mental acquisitions. Now it is obvious, that in every such process we must have some previous apprehension to proceed upon. From things known we proceed to things unknown, or things less known; and the value of our conclusions is invariably determined, by the evidence and the accuracy of the intermediate ideas we employ, to connect our ultimate inference with the primary and admitted principles. When, therefore, any one denies or calls in question the proposition, that "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," are one God, he ought to possess antecedent ideas of the divine unity which shall authorise his exclusion of all the ideas of plurality. He must be able to shew, that in the separate and distinct senses attached to the idea that they are *three*, and the idea that they are *one*, there is a contradiction. Be it remembered, that a difficulty is not a contradiction. A contradiction is something opposite and contrary to what we know to be true; it arises from a perception of the actual disagreement of ideas, while

a difficulty arises merely from the defect or imperfection of our ideas. Now, separate from the testimony of revelation, I know nothing with certainty respecting the divine nature; and if I admit that testimony to be true and authoritative, (and it must be authoritative if it be true,) then the only way by which I can prove the position in question to be *contrary to reason*, is to prove it contrary to that revealed testimony. Reason in every case, must have materials from which to conduct its processes and operations. In reference to matters physical, it must employ the assistance of the organs of sense with which God has furnished us, and rectify individual fallacies by general experience. In reference to matters that belong purely to the operation of our minds, it must employ the assistance of consciousness, and avail itself of the experience of other minds. In reference to matters pertaining to what does not come within the cognizance of our senses or our consciousness, it must employ the assistance of *testimony*, and regulate its admission of the credibility of that testimony by the force of evidence—or certain general conclusions which our own experience and the experience of others may have suggested for the regulation of our confidence, and the guidance of our practice. There are also matters of an abstract nature, in reference to which our judgments are determined by certain axiomatic principles—grounds of belief—which we cannot *prove*, but which we consider self-evident in their nature, and ultimate in their reference. But none of these sources of proof—these materials from which to conduct our reasonings, give us any assistance whatever in order to enable us to prove or to disprove the proposition, that there is a *tri-unity* in the divine nature. How then can we say that the proposition is contrary to reason, when in all

the known and possible sources of proof (if revelation be excluded) there are no data to enable us to arrive at any conclusion whatever on the subject? Apart then from revelation, to reason in these views of it, is impossible. To prove it against reason, it must be within the range of its cognizance. It may be above it; it may be beyond it; but it is purely sophistical to assert that it is contrary to it. In all cases where the nature of things is not clearly and satisfactorily known, it cannot be affirmed that a doctrine contradicts them; there can be no ground for the comparison of ideas, and therefore a rational conclusion that such a doctrine is contrary to reason can never be established.

Most disingenuous attempts are sometimes made by those who pretend to revere the authority of revelation and reject its mysteries, to represent the Roman Catholic doctrine of *Transubstantiation* as a dogma resting on the same ground, and possessing the same authority with the doctrine of what is termed the *Trinity*. The advocates of that monstrous absurdity find it also convenient to class these two subjects together; and thus superstition and scepticism are alike supported by the unholy alliance! But there is no alliance. There are no grounds of analogy in the nature of the evidence; and no points of resemblance between the character of the assumed mystery on the one hand, and that of the peculiar doctrines of revelation on the other. In the dogma of Transubstantiation, there is not merely a difficulty which we cannot explain, but an absurdity which we cannot remove. In reference to the Trinity, we are not called to believe that they are three in the same sense that they are one; or one in the same sense that they are three. This would be a contradiction, an impossibility. In the case of the union of the human with the divine nature in the

person of Christ, we are not called to believe in a conversion of Deity into humanity, or of humanity into Deity; consequently we are not called to believe that what is an essential property of the one can ever be transferred to the other. But in the Romish doctrine, we are called to believe, not only without evidence, but against evidence; and against the evidence of the senses; and against the evidence of the senses of all the world. We are called to believe in opposition to all probability and possibility, as far as possibilities come within the cognizance of human perceptions. Such a dogma overturns the foundation of credit in the testimony of our senses, and thus destroys the competency and the value of all miraculous attestations; for if the senses warrant not our confidence, how can we judge of miracles? It disarranges the entire physical constitution of our nature; it lays both reason and sense in inglorious prostration at the feet of an aspiring priesthood, and most egregiously insults the dictates and convictions of the understanding, under the venerable sanctions of faith and religion! Yet more awful than this insult, is that which licentious scepticism pours on those who believe in the sublime mysteries of revelation, by the unhallowed attempt to associate them with the crudities and absurdities of the "mystery of iniquity."

In the second place, mysteries present no valid objection to the claims of revelation, *because there are analogous mysteries in every other department of human knowledge.* The man, therefore, who rejects the announcements of the Bible because they are incomprehensible, must believe in nothing which he cannot fully understand and explain: and in what tremendous and hopeless scepticism would this principle terminate! What subject is there in the entire

range of science, or within the limits of observation, which is not on some point or other surrounded with mysteries? My own existence, the formation of my animal nature, the material organization on which the development of mind is dependant, the influence of volition on muscular action, the continued preservation of that wondrous and complicated machinery with which health and life and intellect are combined—these are the *penetralia* of nature, its innermost recesses, into which the torch of science has never yet been introduced. Some few facts, indeed, on the surface of these arrangements and phænomena, have been ascertained and classified, and we in our littleness call this *philosophy;* but "who by searching can find out *man?* who can find out *himself* to perfection?" If I go beyond myself, and enter the temple of the universe, how soon I am lost in the contemplation of its mysteries! From the atom to the globe; from the minutest particle of animation, scarcely recognised by microscopic power, to the entire system of living beings around me in all their varieties of structure and form; from the most obvious laws of vegetation, to the immense processes which are carrying on in the great laboratory of nature; from the slightest instance of force or of motion, to those mighty powers that move "the stars in their courses," and regulate the order and harmony of the spheres of light; from the limited horizon stretching around me, to the immeasurable expansion above me, and the entire universe of mind and matter in all its actual immensity;—within these boundaries of things visible and invisible, which constitute the range of nature, what innumerable and incomprehensible mysteries do I contemplate! How feeble are all the powers of human comprehension! How soon we arrive at the limits of our knowledge,

and are compelled to exclaim—"Lo! these are only a portion of his ways!" But if we did comprehend them—if our knowledge were commensurate with the grandeur of the universe, there is still an unapproachable effulgence in which the great Eternal dwells; and the entire glory of the creation, in all its immensity and variety and extent, is, in relation to HIM, infinitely less than is the radiant cloud on which the sun has impressed his setting beam, to that orb of light from which it derives its momentary splendour! "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection? It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth and broader than the sea!" And yet this is the Being whose nature and essence, proud, presumptuous man attempts to understand! This is the Being whose word is called in question, because it is impressed with the same characters of glory and incomprehensibility which are exhibited in his works! This is the Being who, after the immense expenditure of proof in the attestation of his word, is denied and insulted by the ribaldry of scepticism, and the impertinence of unbelief!

It is no answer to these representations to say that much is actually known in the departments of inquiry to which I have referred. It is granted; and much is also actually known respecting those principles of revelation which are in other respects inexplicable. Of neither class can it be said there are any things *unintelligible;* but of both it may be said, there are many things *incomprehensible.* On numerous points in physical science and in mathematical demonstration, certain principles or facts *must be believed* that cannot be explained. "We have certain knowledge

respecting subjects, of which, in themselves, we have no knowledge; there are *demonstrated* irrefragable propositions respecting the *relations* of things, which, *in themselves*, elude the most acute investigations." The argument from analogy is most satisfactory both for the establishment of the truth and the refutation of objections. It is undoubted, and confessed by all who reflect on the subject, that there are mysteries in nature. Yet, notwithstanding, there is decisive evidence for believing in the actual government of the material universe by a Being of wisdom, power, and beneficence. It is no less reasonable to believe that there is a system of *moral* administration; for the actions of intelligent beings are surely far more important than the operations of matter, and require the control and superintendance of a divine government. If certain difficulties arise out of the procedures of that government, tending to excite the doubt of its reality, it is replied, that there are analagous difficulties in the *natural* government of the Most High; so that if you reject the evidence of a divine administration on such ground, you must, for similar reasons, reject the doctrine of a divine existence altogether, and plunge into the tremendous gulph of atheistical speculation! You advance to the discoveries of revelation; there also, as in the arrangements of nature and of providence, are inexplicable difficulties; but if you reject the testimony of revelation on that account, you must for the same reason reject the principles of what is termed natural religion. The death of infants is as mysterious as the doctrine of original sin. The union of the spirit and the body is as mysterious as the union of the divine and human nature in the person of Christ. The doctrines of the eternity and omnipresence of God are as mysterious as the doctrine of

the Trinity. The doctrine of force and the nature of motion in the mechanism of the universe, are as mysterious as the doctrine of grace in the system of religion. The proper essence of matter, or of mind, is as mysterious as the essence of the Divine Being; and wherever we direct our inquiries in the contemplation of "the things that are seen" or "the things that are unseen," we are compelled to exclaim—"OH! THE DEPTH OF THE RICHES BOTH OF THE WISDOM AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD! HOW UNSEARCHABLE ARE HIS JUDGMENTS, AND HIS WAYS PAST FINDING OUT!"

"We cannot," says a most acute reasoner and an acknowledged philosopher of the highest order, "we cannot comprehend the nature of an infinite series so far as that nature depends on an acquaintance with each term; but we know, in algebraic science, the relation which subsists between it and the radix from which it is expanded; we cannot comprehend the nature of the impossible quantities; but we know their relation to one another. In like manner we cannot with our limited faculties comprehend the infinite perfections of the Supreme Being; but we know *his relation to us, if we do not despise or reject the information he has vouchsafed to us as the God of truth.*"*

I remark, thirdly, *that the manner of their announcement is illustrative of their origin.*

The instruments employed both in the Jewish and Christian revelation, exhibit nothing in their mental character that will account for the sublime and exalted conceptions which they disclose respecting the perfections and government of the only true God. This forms one important part of the internal evidence of their

* Dr. Gregory's Letters, Vol. I. p. 13.

divine inspiration. While the wisest sons of nature's light and reason's tuition, amidst all the splendour of Grecian literature and all the subtleties of philosophic speculation, "knew not God," a small and despised community on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, possess a volume which unfolds more sublime conceptions of the Deity than Plato ever imagined, or Cicero ever taught. When I look at the Rabbinical fictions of this very people, their Talmuds or their Mishnas, I find nothing resembling in majesty, and simplicity, and all the evident traces of internal truth, the writings of the Old Testament. By similar characteristics are the writings of the Christian revelation distinguished. In the New Testament I meet with a disclosure of the character of Jesus of Nazareth—I see a combination of simplicity and majesty, of grace and glory, of purest truth and most perfect beauty, such as no uninspired men could have presented. Rousseau was compelled, in a lucid interval, to confess, that "if the character of Jesus was a fiction, the inventor was a more astonishing personage than the hero!"—But who were the narrators? The fishermen and tax-gatherers of Judæa! They could as soon have created a world, as have invented the character of Jesus! Yet these are the men who give us all the sublime and mysterious announcements of Christianity; and they were men of unaffected seriousness—of unimpeachable integrity—of disinterested benevolence—of unostentatious and unambitious principles; and they *proved* all they said, by what they *did*, and what they *were*. They were authorised to exclaim—"*We have received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God.*"*

* 1 Cor. ii. 12.

Be it farther observed, that the peculiar and incomprehensible announcements of this revelation are so interwoven with those parts which are confessedly not of this character, and are so perpetually associated with the feelings and sentiments of the inspired writers, that if we admit the truth and authority of the one, we must admit the truth and authority of the other. We cannot separate them. The truths of the gospel testimony, like the graces of the Christian character, "the fruits of the Spirit," grow and flourish together! The history of the rise and progress of error affords awful proof of this connexion; for if one sublime verity of this system be renounced, the progress and renunciation soon extends to the rest, and actual scepticism in its spirit and results is the awful consequence!

But I observe, *in the last place, that the practical tendencies of Christian mysteries prove them to be divine.*

And here, my friends, I employ an argument in defence of those mysteries, which every reflecting mind will instantly feel to be of the highest importance. That which leads *to* God, must come *from* God. That system of principles which is invariably found, wherever it is understood and received, to produce all the fruits of "pure and undefiled religion," to inspire reverence and fear, gratitude and confidence, zeal and benevolence, activity and devotion, must be truly divine! I am aware that the argument from tendency is sometimes apparently invidious, and always difficult; that some men, in point of fact, may be, as far as our observation extends, better, and some men worse, than their principles; that education, or accident, or associations, may sometimes so modify the effect of any given system, as greatly to neutralize its influence.

But I refer to such instances of tendency as may be proved to be the natural and legitimate result of principles; and it is on this ground I would establish the reasoning in the case before us. What are the distinguishing features of practical godliness as exhibited in the principles and embodied in the biographical records of inspiration? I answer, in the first place,—*Humility*. This temper is the offspring of self-knowledge; it is a distrust of our own powers and resources; it leads to an abandonment of all ideas of merit, and is especially characterized by an entire dependence on the power and grace and sufficiency of the Redeemer. It is a principle which leads to prayer, self-abasement, and an implicit submission to God's method of salvation; a principle that secures self-denial, self-diffidence, self-renunciation, and, above all, is marked by a cordial reception of what the authority of God reveals as the subject of faith and the rule of obedience. Humility is that "poverty of spirit" on which the Redeemer pronounced his first benediction; it was the temper which he inculcated when he took a child and placed it before his disciples to repress their pride and reprove their unhallowed contentions. He exhibited it as a living illustration of the docility and submission which he required, and often reiterated the declaration,—"Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven!"

May I not, without any violation of candour, ask, does that system which rejects the mysteries of Christianity, tend to produce this spirit? Is it not characterized by the pride of intellect and the pride of merit? Does it not lead men to take offence at the incomprehensibility of the truths revealed, and to "stumble"

at the foot of the cross? Is not that system, which rejects the deity and atonement of the Son of God, identified with those principles and reasonings, which made the doctrines of an apostolic ministry "a stumbling-block to the Jew and foolishness to the Greek?"—"By their fruits ye shall know them."

Love to the Redeemer, and supreme devotion to his service and his cause, were eminently marked features in the character of the first disciples of Christianity. Their attachment was not romantic enthusiasm, but enlightened conviction. Their affections had all the ardour of passion, and their passion all the stability of principle. They lived in the element of spiritual and heavenly-minded feelings; and gratitude, zeal, and active consecration to the interests of truth and holiness, were the visible and prominent features which appeared in their spirit and intercourse. Does that system of nominal Christianity, which rejects or explains away the peculiarities of revelation, secure these results? Is there any congeniality between the one and the other? "I speak to wise men; judge ye what I say."

The mystery for which we contend is emphatically THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS, and is directly subservient to the cultivation of *eminent piety*. Unlike the mysteries of ancient heathenism—all its principles are characterised by their purity. If the incomprehensible glories of the Divine Nature be contemplated, we hear the voices of Seraphim, as they veil their faces before the throne of the Eternal, exclaiming, HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, IS JEHOVAH GOD OF HOSTS! If the mystery of the divine purpose be contemplated, it is, that those who are its objects "may be holy and without blame before him." If we regard the mystery of the Incarnation, it was, that "Jesus might save his people from

their sins!" If the mystery of Redemption, in all its provisions and securities, be regarded, it is a "redemption from all iniquity." If the sublime mysteries of future glory be presented to the anticipations of our faith and hope;

> "Those holy gates for ever bar
> Pollution, sin, and shame;"

and the holiness of heaven is a proof of the divinity of that religion which prepares us for its enjoyment! There is not a fact of Revelation, nor a principle it announces, nor an institution it enjoins, nor a promise it records, nor a prospect it unfolds, which does not bear upon it the impress of holiness, "the image and superscription of heaven!" How false, how fallacious, how directly opposed to every principle of just reasoning and undoubted fact, is the dogma sometimes announced, as if an oracle had uttered the lie, that "*where mystery begins religion ends.*" If by mystery be meant—mysticism—fanaticism—the art of evasive concealment, or of studied obscurity,—the system that palliates iniquity, or pleads for vice,—and deludes and deceives and destroys—it may be true. But, if by the position be meant, the incomprehensible statements of revelation, it is FALSE; and every part of those statements, and every genuine believer in their importance, is a proof of that falsehood! For the wisest of sages, and the most eminent of legislators, and the sublimest sons of genius, and the greatest of philosophers, and the most distinguished benefactors of their country and the world, and the most eminent patterns of spirituality, and purity, and devotion, in every age, have gloried in the cross of Christ, and rejoiced to acknowledge with humble and grateful prostration of spirit, the supreme authority of the

inspired records, as the depository and guardian of holy mysteries!

Thus I have attempted to establish the authority and illustrate the character of these sublime verities of our religion: and numerous are the deductions which might be warrantably drawn from these reasonings. But I close this protracted discourse by remarking, that *it shews the infinite importance of faith in the divine testimony, and justifies its solemn requisition.* For your faith, or your unbelief, you are individually responsible, because in either case, it indicates the actual state of your heart. If a fellow creature were to make an announcement which affected your interests, you would feel yourselves bound to regard it, in proportion to the estimate you formed of his character. The views you entertained of his knowledge, his integrity, his influence, his authority, his capability of promoting your welfare, would naturally affect the confidence with which his testimony might be regarded; and you would at once condemn, as evincing either monstrous depravity, or hopeless imbecility of mind, that individual who should profess a total disregard to all the reasons for credibility which might be founded in moral character. If the announcement in question came from a *father*—a *judge*—a *sovereign*, you would feel that this demand on your confidence and reception was increased, in proportion to the nearness or the magnitude of the relation sustained. But here, the "Father of your spirits," the Governor of the Universe, addresses you. The proclamation is proved to be from "the King of kings." The message, mysterious as are some of its statements, is a message from heaven. You are placed in circumstances which enable you to judge of the evidence and

claims of that message. Can it for a moment be admitted, that you are at liberty to reject it with impunity? Is not unbelief *on any ground,* an act of ingratitude, of rebellion, of strange and most irrational infatuation? Is not faith a reasonable and just requisition? Is it not right and proper, that the divinely accredited herald of such a message should not only invite but demand your credence, your confidence, your implicit and grateful and immediate submission? Is it not such a report "worthy of all acceptation;" and is not the sanction enforcing its claim as rational as it is awful—"*He that believeth not shall be condemned?*"

It is possible that I may be addressing some on this occasion, who may have been seduced by the artifices of a sceptical philosophy. I ask, have you examined the record? Have you reflected on its proofs? Have you considered your own individual responsibility?

> "Within this awful volume lies
> The mystery of mysteries!
> Happiest they of human race,
> To whom God has given grace,
> To read, to fear, to hope, to pray—
> To lift the latch—and force their way;
> And better had they ne'er been born,
> Who read to doubt, or read to scorn!"*

"See that you refuse not Him that speaketh; for if they escaped not, who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from HIM that speaketh from heaven!"

* Such are reported to have been the lines, written by LORD BYRON on the blank leaf of a Bible! He *now* knows whether what he wrote be true or false! I refer, with unmingled satisfaction, to the able reasonings and faithful appeals of Dr. WARDLAW, in his Sermon on, "*Man responsible for his Belief.*"

But I am addressing those, who "know in whom they have believed." Let me exhort you, my brethren, to "*hold fast the mystery of the faith.*" With that "mystery" your highest interests for time and eternity are connected. Cherish an habitual conviction of the sacredness and claims of that divine testimony which reveals the only ground of confidence towards God, and directs you to the only sources of peace and consolation. "Yield yourselves to God." Every principle of vital religion is included in this act of sacred dedication. What is *faith,* but yielding to the authority of his word? What is *hope,* but yielding to the promises of his mercy? What is *love,* but yielding to the claim he has on your hearts? What is *obedience,* but yielding your "bodies and spirits" to his service? All these holy affections are intimately associated with the "Mysteries of Revelation." Abandon them, overlook them, forget their prominence, or their importance in the system of your religious principles, and there will be no true spirituality, and no "unction from the Holy One" resting upon you. There will be a progression in worldly-mindedness, and a declension as to the power and vitality of religion, proportioned to your practical indifference to those peculiarities of the gospel, which are so closely associated with personal, domestic, and social religion. Your devotion in the closet, your sanctity in the family, your consistent obedience in the world, your efficiency and harmony and prosperity in the church, are all combined with the influence of those truths which are essentially blended with these holy mysteries. "Endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace;" and "beware lest any man spoil you through a vain and deceitful philosophy." Live by faith on the Son of God; "grieve not the Holy Spirit of

God;" and you will have internal and experimental demonstration that "your faith does not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

And---Oh! my Christian friends, how cheering is the prospect of that world, where we shall "know as we are known, and that which is in part shall be done away." Now our state is infantile; we are disciples *at school;* our language is the lisping of children, our judgments are immature, our affections often wayward and perverse, our mental vision feeble, and our perceptions obscure and imperfect. But, if we are sitting at the feet of the "Great Teacher," and with humility and gratitude reposing an entire confidence in his guidance, and receiving all his instructions, he will soon conduct us to a higher station under his gracious superintendance. We shall then be *at home,* prepared for the higher services and holier fellowship of an eternal residence in "the house of our Father." The causes of imperfection shall be removed. No error shall pervert our judgment---no sin pollute our hearts---no darkness obscure our vision; and the weakness and sorrows of the present state shall be exchanged for the discoveries and enjoyments of a glorified immortality.

FINIS.

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