

THE
INTENT AND PROPRIETY
OF THE
SCRIPTURE MIRACLES
CONSIDERED AND EXPLAINED,
In a SERIES of
SERMONS,

Preached in the Parish Church of

St. MARY LE-BOW,

In the Years 1769, 1770, and 1771;

For the LECTURE founded by

The Hon. ROBERT BOYLE, Esq;

By the Rev. Dr. HENRY OWEN,

Rector of St. OLAVE, Hart-Street.

And FELLOW of the ROYAL SOCIETY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON,

Printed by *W. Bowyer* and *J. Nichols*:

For J. and F. RIVINGTON, in St. Paul's Church-Yard,

MDCCLXXIII.

T O

THE MOST REVEREND FATHERS IN GOD,

F R E D E R I C K,
LORD ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY; .

R O B E R T,
LORD ARCHBISHOP OF YORK:

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
LORD GEORGÉ CAVENDISH,
LORD FREDERICK CAVENDISH, AND
LORD JOHN CAVENDISH,

TRUSTEES FOR THE LECTURE FOUNDED BY
THE HONOURABLE ROBERT BOYLE, ESQ.,

T H E S E S E R M O N S,
PREACHED BY THEIR APPOINTMENT,

ARE, WITH ALL GRATITUDE
AND HUMILITY, INSCRIBED BY

THE AUTHOR.

P R E F A C E.

A Short sketch of what is now contained in the following Discourses was drawn out, and exhibited to the public in a small tract, so long ago as the year 1755. As I heard of no objections made to the principles of that treatise, I thought it adviseable, when appointed Preacher of Mr. Boyle's Lecture, to prosecute the plan laid down therein, and to extend it to its full dimensions. And this I determined the rather to do, as so little had been written on the subject of *miracles*, by any of my predecessors in the same office.

The *general* doctrine of *miracles* having been so fully stated by several authors of great note, I had no occasion to dwell much upon it. If I have been successful in applying it to *particular* cases; and consequently in explaining some of the most extraordinary, and therefore the most disputable, parts of Scripture; my design is completely answered—and my appointment, I trust, not wholly unfulfilled.

Whatever observations my reading or meditation could supply on the subject, these I have endeavoured to bring all together into one regular and consistent scheme: the parts of which harmoniously conspire, not only to support and illustrate each other, but also to form a *grand whole*—manifestly expressive of the wisdom and goodness of divine Providence, and clearly demonstrative of the truth and certainty of our holy religion.

In the construction and conduct of this scheme, I had, I must own, a particular
view

view to the benefit and improvement of young Divines; for whose use I have inserted some quotations, which are to be looked upon, not so much in the light of *proofs*, as of *references* to the authors who have discussed the points more at large. The scheme itself will, however, afford them a general *key* to the whole Scripture; as it will shew them the *grounds* of the several dispensations, and point out the *reasons* why each of them proceeded in the manner it is observed to do.

They will here see a grand design planned from the beginning—they will see this design carried on by various means, and in various forms, through the several periods of the world—they will see the propriety of these forms and methods, in their adaptation to the state and circumstances of the time in which they took place—they will see them all working together, and at last uniting in the perfect accomplishment of the end proposed; the redemption and recovery

of fallen man—they will therefore, of course, see revelation in its proper light ; and be the more convinced of its reasonableness, truth, and divinity.

For a more particular information of the true scope and intent of the work, it may be of use to observe, that it naturally divides itself into *six* parts.

Part the *first*, comprehended in Sermon I—III. treats of “ the analogy of revealed religion with the constitution and course of nature—and of the credibility and certainty of miraculous interpositions.”

Part the *second*, comprehended in Sermon IV—VI. treats of “ the moral state of the world from the creation to the deluge ; the nature of the dispensations relative thereto ; and the propriety of the miracles interwoven with them.”

Part the *third*, comprehended in Sermon VII—X. treats of “ the moral state of
the

the world from the deluge to the departure out of Egypt; the several dispensations relative thereto; and the miraculous interpositions by which they were supported."

Part the *fourth*, comprehended in Sermon XI—XVI. treats of "the moral state of the world from the departure out of Egypt to the end of the Babylonish captivity; the several dispensations relative thereto; and the suitableness of the miracles, which occur in that period, to the great end they were designed to promote."

Part the *fifth*, comprehended in Sermon XVII. treats of "the moral state of the world at the time of our Saviour's appearance—and of the necessity of a new revelation."

Part the *sixth*, comprehended in Sermon XVIII—XXIII. treats of "the connection between the doctrines of Christ and the moral exigences of mankind—and of the analogy between his miracles and doctrines."

Conclusion—Sermon XXIV.

More

More errors have escaped me in supervising the press, than I could wish. Those which particularly affect the sense, and which are marked with an *asterisk*, the Reader is desired to correct in the following manner:

V O L. I.

P. L.		P. L.
6	17 * that the scriptural	109 N. 5. version
38	20 breathe	149 3. dele that
64	10 * and how will you	165 Note (c) Ashur
78	13 * of his condition	239 N. 6. prodiderunt
86	19 * once failed him,	Ibid. ult. τηλαυγής
99	8 paradisiacal	266 Note (m) 4 florem
Ibid.	13 consciences	267 18 * was it.

7 DE 61

C O N-

C O N T E N T S

O F

V. O L U M E I.

S E R M O N I.

I PET. iii. 15.

Be ready always to give an answer to every man, that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and reverence. p. 1.

S E R M O N II.

I PET. iii. 15.

Be ready always to give an answer to every man, that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you. p. 25

S E R-

S E R M O N III.

GEN. xviii. 14.

Is any thing too hard for the Lord? p. 49:

S E R M O N IV.

GEN. iii. 14, 15.

*And the Lord God said unto the serpent;
Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed
above all cattle, and above every beast of the
field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust
shalt thou eat all the days of thy life.*

*And I will put enmity between thee and the
woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it
shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise
his heel.*

P. 75:

S E R M O N V.

JUDE, ver. 14, 15.

*And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, pro-
phesied of these, saying; “ Behold the Lord
cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to
execute judgement upon all, and to convince
all that are ungodly among them, of all their
ungodly deeds, which they have ungodly
committed,*

C O N T E N T S. xiii

committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him." p. 103

S E R M O N VI.

GEN. vi. 3.

And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man; for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years. p. 131.

S E R M O N VII.

GEN. xi. ver. 4—8.

*And they said, Go to, let us build us a city, and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.
And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.
And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do; and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.*

Go

Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.

P. 157.

S E R M O N VIII.

GEN. xii. 1—3.

And the Lord said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee.

And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing.

And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

P. 185.

S E R-

C O N T E N T S.

xv

S E R M O N IX.

J U D E, ver. 7.

Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them, in like manner giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. p. 207.

S E R M O N X.

P S A L M lxxviii. 12.

Marvellous things did he in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan. p. 231

S E R M O N XI.

D E U T. xxxii. 9, 10.

The Lord's portion is his people, Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.

He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. p. 257.

S E R-

S E R M O N . XII.

PSALM xliv. 3.

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. p. 279.

7 DE 61

S E R-

S E R M O N L

1 PET. iii. 15.

Be ready always to give an answer to every man, that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and reverence.

IT is the plain intention of the Apostle in the text, to exhort Christians of every degree, to furnish themselves with such a competent knowledge of the principles and evidences of the religion they profess, as to be always ready, always prepared, to stand up in its defence and support; and to render, whenever they are called upon, a clear, just, and satisfactory account of it: such an account as may convince any candid, unprejudiced inquirer, that their “faith and
 VOL. I. B hope”

hope^a” are well grounded; have a solid foundation in truth and reason; and consequently, that they act a most rational part in believing and professing that religion, which conveys to them such assured hopes.

But though the exhortation is addressed to Christians in general, and requires no more than what Christians in general are able to perform; for the evidences of religion, and its leading principles, are in the main obvious to the most common understanding: yet it must be owned, that several objections have been made to both; both to the proofs, and to the principles of religion; which require for their solution a much larger stock of learning and knowledge, than falls to the share of its ordinary professors; and which therefore might be apt to weaken at least, if not to “overthrow the faith of some^b,” were they left, unassisted, to defend themselves.

^a So read some ancient Latin copies, and the Syriac version.
Comp. ch. i. 21.

^b 2 Tim. ii. 18.

Knowing then the artifices and sophistry of unbelievers, who constantly “lie in wait to deceive”^a; and sensible of the benefit, the very great benefit, of guarding the more ignorant, but well-meaning Christian from their insidious assaults; it became the concern of the pious Founder of this LECTURE, who nobly defended religion by his writings, and eminently adorned it by his life; it became, I say, his concern, especially when he saw the bold and threatening encroachments of infidelity; to strengthen the hands of believers against it, and to supply them with proper arms of defence.

With this view, and in a manner the most likely to accomplish the end, he expressly provided by his last Will and Testament, that a succession of Preachers might be continued on, whose province it should be to clear and explain the fundamentals of religion; to collect and illustrate the evidences of it; to remove the objections, which from time to time might be urged against it; and thereby to instruct and enable

^a Ephes. iv. 22.

4. S-E R M O N I.

their hearers to give an answer to all, who might press them with doubts and questions about it.

At my entrance then on the duties of this office, and by way of introduction to the principal design which I have proposed to myself in the execution of it; I think it necessary to bespeak your attention to a certain point or *postulatum*, that lies at the bottom both of the Philosopher's institution, and the Apostle's exhortation.

And the point is this—

“ That our religion is capable of a rational defence”—or else it had been to little purpose, either for the one to require us, or for the other to appoint us, to give a reason for it.

But it is indeed from this principle, from the consciousness, if I may so speak, of its own rationality, that our religion disdains to be taken upon trust; that it urges itself to a trial; and desires no other favour, but that of a sober and dispassionate examination: sure then of approving itself, to the conviction of any candid inquirer, as a wise and
gracious.

gracious institution; highly conducive to the real happiness of mankind; and exhibiting, in the form of its several dispensations, evident marks of its divine original.

To a cool, candid reasoner it must appear, I think, somewhat strange, that the Deist, who is so ready to acknowledge this *material* system, which we now behold, to be the real workmanship of God, should yet be so averse from admitting the truth, and owning the divinity of that *spiritual* system, which stands revealed in the holy Scriptures. For, if the frame of the world speaks God for its author; if the attributes of the Deity are plainly discernible from the works of creation; if the stupendous grandeur and astonishing immensity of the whole fabric point out his supreme *power*; if the beautiful symmetry, regular disposition, and admirable propriety of the several parts, are manifest indications of his infinite *wisdom*; if the harmonious tendency and concurrence of all, towards the support and welfare of the system, proclaim the excellency of his *goodness*: if these manifestations in the *ma-*

B 3

terial

terial world refer us up to God, and prove that his hand produced, and directs it; must not the like manifestations in the *spiritual* world necessarily refer us to the same perfect Being?

Now, if we look into the Scriptures, where that world is represented to us, we shall clearly perceive, if we are not blinded by some inveterate prejudice, the very same signatures of divinity—equal exertions of *power*, analogous dispositions of *wisdom*, and similar intentions of *goodness*—impressed on the works of grace, as are manifested in the works of nature. And therefore, if we judge of *moral*, as of *natural* things, we must needs allow, since the *criteria* are of the same kind, that that *scriptural* system of religion was at first planned, and all along supported, by the same great and gracious Being, who created and governs the *natural* system of the world.

If nature be esteemed “the power of God, and the wisdom of God,” operating to the welfare of the body; religion is as evidently “the power of God, and the wisdom
dom

dom of God ^d,^e operating to the salvation of the soul. To be convinced of this, we need only attend to the striking analogy, that subsists between them.

If we see, as we cannot but see, that the constitution and course of nature is wisely accommodated to the security and welfare of the *animal* life ^e; and that this accommodation is applied and continued, not by one uniform immutable process, but by a course of agency variously diversified, according to the various relations of the creatures, and the various necessities to which they are subject: do we not also see, that the scheme of religion, or the economy of grace, is adapted in like manner to the security and happiness of the *spiritual* life; and that, to answer this purpose, the administration of the Deity is variously diversified, according to the various states and conditions, or the moral exigences, of mankind?

^d 1 Cor. i, 24.

^e Incolumitatis ac salutis omnium causa videmus hunc statum esse hujus totius mundi atque naturæ. CICERO de Orat. Lib. iii. § 45.

If we say that Providence originally subjected the *natural* world to the direction of certain laws, calculated to support and maintain its constitution; does not the Scripture say, that he also placed the *moral* world under the like regulation?

If we find, that, when natural bodies begin to be impaired, a certain principle takes place, in order to supply the waste, and restore them to their pristine condition; do we not also find, that revelation comes in with the like design, to repair the breaches of morality, and to reinstate mankind in their original uprightness?

In fine, If we perceive that the order and disposition of nature tends to promote the very same end, that revelation is designed to accomplish; if both of them operate, in their respective ways, to the advancement of virtue, and the suppression of vice; what else can we conclude, but that both are parts of one moral system, and make up together one regular scheme of providence for the general happiness of mankind?

¹ See Bp. BUTLER's Analogy, part II. chap. 3.

For since the natural and the revealed dispensation of things do thus mutually accord, thus closely unite, and co-operate with each other; the plain consequence is, that both are derived from the same cause and author. But God is universally acknowledged to be the author of nature: and He must therefore, on the same principles, be acknowledged the author of revelation too.

And if revelation comes from this perfect Being, the fountain of all wisdom and goodness; we are hence furnished with a strong argument *à priori*, that the whole system of it, and its several parts, must be founded on the highest *reason*. For infinite wisdom will always act conformably to itself in all its dispensations.

Accordingly, if we descend lower — try and examine the contents of revelation; and argue the point *à posteriori*, from its *internal* character; the reasonableness and importance, the truth and divinity of it will instantly appear in a full and conspicuous light. The excellency of its doctrines, the purity of its precepts, the propriety of its institutions, and the weight of its sanctions, all conspire
to

to fix and ascertain the descent it claims ; and to prove it as truly worthy of God, as it is useful and beneficial to mankind,

If we proceed on to its *external* proofs ; to the several attestations that have been made to it : if we consider the prophecies that have been fulfilled, and the miracles that have been wrought, in confirmation of it : prophecies, which none but he alone, whose knowledge is infinite, could possibly dictate ; and miracles, which exhibit the clearest indication of the finger of God : “ works, such as none could do, except God were with him : ” if we seriously attend to these amazing exertions of knowledge and power, which have been repeatedly, and in the most public manner, displayed in support of the several portions of this grand system of Scripture revelation : if we consider properly their nature and end ; and estimate the weight they carry with them ; we shall find them sufficient, in all reason, to evince the truth of those dispensations, of which they make so remarkable a part.

John iii. 2.

Indeed,

Indeed, the sufficiency of them for this purpose is in fact evident. For numbers of people, in different ages and countries, actually embraced the particular revelations delivered to them, as true and divine, on the strength and authority of that evidence, which these exertions supplied. And though the splendor of the light, which revelation diffused; and the awfulness of the miracles, that were performed in confirmation of it; might render this evidence more sensibly affecting to those, who were eye and ear-witnesses, than it can be to us, who receive it through the medium of historical information: yet is there still strength enough, still weight and force enough in it, to satisfy any capable and fair reasoner, of the truth of the religion, it is brought to attest. Nay, upon the whole, we stand now, in this respect, on full as good, if not, perhaps, on better ground, than the most advantageous of our predecessors.

The *intrinsic* excellency of revealed religion; the nobleness of the end it proposes; and the propriety of the means, by which
that

that end is prosecuted: *these* characters of its divinity are full as clear and apparent to us, as ever they were to the acutest of those who lived in the ages before us.

And with regard to its *external* proofs; they are so admirably constructed in their nature, and have been so securely guarded in their conveyance downwards, that they still shine forth, and strike the mind with equal force and lustre. And if one branch of them be now diminished, the other is proportionably increased: if miracles are ceased, prophecies are daily accomplished: so that the balance is still kept even; and the sum total of the evidence must appear nearly the same to us, as it did to our remoter ancestors. If there be any difference, it lies plainly on our side. For, as we are favoured with a more extensive view of this wonderful system, so we can more clearly see the dependencies and connections of its several parts; their united tendencies to one grand design; and the surprising progress that is already made towards the actual completion of it.

And

And when we see, in the course of this progress, such a number of prophecies and miracles, running down through the long extent of five thousand years; all of them working together; all of them uniting their forces; and forming a chain of connected facts, every link of which communicates strength to every other:—When we see this to be the case; the evidence resulting from such a combination, manifestly proves the whole plan to be infinitely superior to any *human* contrivance. That wisdom, which could guide a progression of facts, through so immense a tract of time, with an uniform direction to one determinate end, could certainly be no other, than the wisdom that foresees all future events: and that power, which could guard it through all the interruptions of the greatest revolutions, and all the embarrassments of the most untoward occurrences, could certainly be no other, than the power which governs the affairs of the world^h. In so effectual a man-

^h ROTHERAM'S Sketch of the one great argument. §. VII. P. 55.

ner does the general harmony, that runs through the system of revealed religion, set forth the truth and divinity of it; and, at the same time, ascertain the *reality* of the prophecies and miracles; which are so intimately connected, and interwoven with it.

And as to the *proofs*, which these prophecies and miracles supply, in their turn, for the support and confirmation of the system; we have no reason to suspect, as I said before, that they are in the least weakened, or diminished in their force, because we stand at such a distance from them. For if they, who were co-eval with the miracles or prophecies, had the evidence of their senses for the truth of those particular facts that fell under their notice; we are possessed of this superior advantage, that we have all the facts in view at once; can see and contemplate the whole series entire; and can deliberately examine its strength and connection, throughout all its parts. What they saw, piece by piece, in a disjointed manner, we see connected and combined together; built up into a regular, solid and beautiful structure; and from the
excel-

excellency of the work can clearly discover the wisdom and abilities of its divine Architect.

So far we advance on the credit of Scripture, considered only as an historical narration of facts. But we are farther to observe, that God has not left us to mere historical information for the reality and existence of those prophecies and miracles, on which we ground our belief. There is one monument now standing before our eyes, consisting both of prophecy and miracle—I mean the present state of the Jews—which bears testimony to the truth of revelation, in an ample, visible manner; and will probably continue to bear testimony to it, till it has effectually triumphed over the infidelity of the Gentile, and the obstinacy of the Jew; till it has brought down the proud, exalted notions of the one, and the fallacious, sophistical reasonings of the other, into an humble and willing obedience to the faith of Christ. And then, both parties, both Jews and Gentiles, will see with admiration, that “the weapons of our warfare”—the arguments arising
I from

from prophecies and miracles—"are mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds¹;" to the subduing of the prejudices, and clearing of the difficulties, that stand in the way of Faith.

Such reasons have we to believe, that the Scripture-revelation is derived from God: and equal reasons have we to hope, that it will finally lead us, if we obey its dictates, to a state of perfection and happiness. If we steadily adhere to these reasons, which unite and confirm the whole of revelation; we shall never be moved by those minute objections, which are chiefly drawn from the fancied blemishes, or false representation of *detached* parts. Revelation is a system; and it is to no purpose to attempt the subversion of it by the demolition of particular portions. For the connection that runs through the whole, cements it so firmly together, that it must either stand or fall in one entire body. But no man has been yet hardy enough to attack it in this compacted form. And if those forward critics, who

¹ 2 Cor. x. 4.

talk with so much petulance and boldness of the defects or deformities of particular parts, could be prevailed upon to view them in their relation to the general system; they would soon alter their opinion of them; and from being, what they now are, the subject of their ridicule, they would become the object of their admiration and regard.

From such an extended and comprehensive view, it would manifestly appear, that all these imagined irregularities; all these seeming defects or deformities, detract no more from the *beauty* of revelation, than craggy mountains and shelving vallies detract from the *rotundity* of the globe. Nay, it would appear; upon closer examination, that the *former* in the *moral*, as the *latter* in the *natural* world; are of great use and service; perhaps indispensably necessary to the benefit and perfection of the whole. For then it would appear; that some of them contain vast, latent *mines* of wisdom and goodness; whilst others serve to convey down to more distant places the *surplus* of those blessings,

which copiously fell on some particular spots.

But, notwithstanding these fair and rational deductions, men of perverse minds will still cavil and find faults; will still raise *new* objections, as fast as the *old* ones are cleared off. And hence it is, that the Apostle is so earnest with us, to “be *always* ready to give a reason of the hope, or faith, that is in us:”—as well knowing, that, in every age of the church, such a preparation would be highly necessary: since in every age, opponents to religion would perpetually arise, who should call forth its professors to the perpetual exercise of their zeal and knowledge. And perhaps, had it not been for the opposition of such adversaries to rouse them, its professors might have gradually sunk into a deplorable ignorance of the *doctrines* of religion, as well as into a shameful neglect of the *duties* of it. This however is certain, that the cavils raised against religion have all along providentially served to promote its interest. For they have excited a noble spirit of inquiry: in consequence of which,

which, the Scriptures came to be every day more diligently studied, more closely examined, and more critically canvassed, than, in all probability, they would otherwise have been. And the result is, that the grounds of our faith are now much better, and more generally understood; and the objections against them are of course more easily answered^k. And here let it be remarked, that a difficulty in religion, or an objection to it, once removed, becomes afterwards equivalent to a *positive* argument in its favour: adapted to refresh the faith of believers; and to keep them more steadfast and fixed in their profession.

Considerations these, that should make us attentive to the *latter* part of the Apostle's advice; and treat our adversaries "with meekness and reverence." For, with regard to *us*, all their attempts have turned out to our signal advantage^l; which should therefore extinguish our resentment against them.

^k See GERARD'S Dissertations on the *Genius* and *Evidences* of Christianity. Dissert. II. § 3.

^l GERARD, Diss. II. § 4.

And, with regard to *them*, the only way to work their conversion is to apply to their reason with civility and respect. Illiberal and violent methods of defence are prejudicial to *any* cause: they render the *best* suspicious. It is our boast, that our religion is founded on argument: let it therefore be our business to defend it by argument. But every argument, to maintain its force, should be proposed in the spirit of candor and benevolence. If bitterness and arrogance be mixed with it, it will lose of its weight in proportion as men are disgusted at the rudeness with which it is offered. Whereas, had it been stated in a milder way, it might happily have operated with its whole influence, to the comfort of the proposer, and the conviction of the adversary.

And this method is the more to be regarded, because it was the method pursued by the Apostles: who, though they scorned to ensnare the world by “the enticing words of man’s wisdom^m,” were yet careful to convey their arguments in a mild and persuasive

^m 1 Cor. ii. 4.

manner—"in meekness instructing those that opposed themselves," as the most likely means of bringing them over "to the acknowledgment of the truth". They submitted the proofs and evidences of their religion to a free and impartial examination; and then left them to operate on the minds of their hearers, according to their weight and strength. And what was the consequence? Why, by these means, Christianity made a quick and surprising progress; spread itself with amazing rapidity over all the most celebrated, all the most enlightened kingdoms of the world; silencing the oppositions of vain philosophy, and triumphing over the power of civil policy; and, what were still harder to be conquered, over the prejudices and passions of mankind. But the same evidence, and the same efficacy it had at first, our religion still retains. It was brought to the test in every age; and in every age has stood the trial. Nay, the more it has been tried, the brighter it has appeared; and when fairly represented, has

ⁿ 2 Tim. ii. 25.

been too piercing and amiable to fail of its just effect.

It had one advantage, indeed, in the beginning, which the corruption of later times has unhappily deprived it of: I mean, the advantage of appearing in its native dress, and adorned “with the fruits of good living.” This appearance gained on the affections of mankind, and charmed the world into an admiration of it. For, who of any ingenuity of mind, could help admiring a religion, that shone forth with so much amiableness; and exhibited in its effects such a fulness of “grace and truth!”

Now, in order to replace it on its proper basis, and restore it to its ancient honours, let us bring it again to the standard of Scripture; and endeavour by our lives, as well as by our arguments, to illustrate the power of it. The end of faith is virtue: and if our life be accordingly answerable to our faith, its evidence will be almost irresistible. The divine excellency of it will appear conspicuous in the purity of conversation it inspires; and the divine authority of it will be

Be clearly seen in the goodly fruits it produces. By thus fulfilling the true design of our own faith, we may recover others to the acknowledgment of it. For to make “our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works,” is, perhaps, one of the strongest inducements we can set before them to imitate our example; to engage them to embrace the same faith; and by the practice of the same virtues, “to glorify our Father, who is in heaven.” To whom, with the Son and the Holy Ghost be ascribed all honour and glory, &c. *Amen.*

^a Matth. v. 16.

S E R M O N II.

I PET. iii. 15.

Be ready always to give an answer to every man, that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.

IT is surprising to observe, says an ingenious writer ^P, how closely the most interesting and momentous truths are connected together ; and in how regular a train they issue forth, and flow from each other.

That there is a God, the frame of the universe, on every part of which the signatures of divinity are so visibly impressed, plainly demonstrates to us.

But if there be a God, the creator and governor of the world ; then there must be,

^P SEED, vol. II. Sermon. VI.

of course, some homage due to him from his rational and dependant creatures : that is, in other words, there must be some religion. And if some religion be necessary, it must be such a religion as is properly calculated for the general benefit of mankind. And what religion is there in the world, that is so well adapted to the circumstances, and makes so noble a provision for the improvement and happiness of mankind, as that which is revealed in the holy Scriptures?

Such reflections as these naturally remind us of the precept in the text, and prepare us in some measure for the discharge of it. They lead us to examine the grounds of our religion, and to weigh the evidences by which it is supported. These researches into the grounds and evidences of it, will enable us, according to the degrees of our proficiency, to “give an answer to every man, that asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us.”

But to render ourselves such masters of the subject, as to be able to return a satisfactory answer, and to shew the reasonableness

ness of every part; we must previously acquire a true and perfect notion of the real design of religion in general; and then consider the fitness and propriety of its several dispensations to promote and accomplish that design, through the various states and conditions of the world. For it is from the state and condition, that is, from the moral exigences of mankind, that revelation takes its rise: and it is to the nature of these exigencies that its contents are adapted. And therefore it must be from a comparative view of both together, that the reasonableness and excellency of any dispensation can be rightly deduced and illustrated.

Now, such a comparative view of the states of the world, and the revealed dispensations connected with them, the Scripture faithfully exhibits to us; and thereby supplies us with a proper clue, to trace the beauties, and to unfold the wisdom, of this mighty, stupendous plan.

If then we consult the Scripture-account, it will manifestly appear, that, whilst man preserved his original state, and acted up to his

his natural abilities, the government of the world went on, as we might expect, in a regular and uniform manner—without interruption, deviation or change. For what need of any alterations, or extraordinary interpositions, when the first man, under the guidance of his Creator, as a son under the tuition of his father, might by the established course of things, attain to that knowledge, virtue and happiness, for which he was originally designed?

But he perversely forsook the guide of his life, and vainly set up for his own director; in consequence of which, he not only fell far below the standard of his nature, but sunk into the depth of misery and woe. Now if God, in his goodness, determined to raise this fallen and corrupted man to his primitive station; much more if he designed to advance him to higher degrees of virtue and happiness, than what could be attained by the pre-established laws of nature; it is obvious to conclude, that he must necessarily effect it by some supernatural method.

The

The constitution and course of nature was originally adapted to the state of innocence; and contained no remedy for evils, occasioned by voluntary defection. These, if remedied at all, must be remedied by a superior hand; and in a way different from the original establishment. Accordingly we find, that, when God came down to judge the offenders, but, at the same time, with the kind intention of rescuing them at last from the misery and ruin they had brought upon themselves; he shewed this intention, as the case required, by an extraordinary exertion of knowledge and power—by prophecy and miracle: by prophecy first, to open to the view of disconsolate man a new prospect of happiness, and to rekindle in his breast new hopes; and then by miracle, to strengthen and confirm those hopes in him, and to assure him of their future completion.

The *promise*, thus made and confirmed, brought to our first parents seasonable relief, and placed them again under the guidance of religion. But here it is to be observed, that,

that, as their character was now become more complicated, (for we are to consider them not only as men, but also as sinners) so their religion became of course proportionably complex likewise.

As *men*, or rational beings, they were still subject to the religion of nature, and the law of reason: they were still bound to entertain a right knowledge of God; and to pay him sincere, unfeigned obedience:

But as *sinners*, admitted into a covenant of grace, they were moreover to profess, according to the tenour of that covenant, a right faith in the promised Redeemer; through the merits of whom the sincerely obedient were to be restored to happiness:

True religion then, on the establishment of the new œconomy after the *fall*, consisted of these two parts—which it concerns us constantly to bear in mind, as of great importance in our future inquiries.

Now, had the succeeding generations retained this religion pure and incorrupt in both its parts, and lived up to the measure of its obligations; the administration of di-
vine

vine government would probably have proceeded in its usual course, without any farther deflections.

But this, alas! was very far from being the case. Mankind in a short time corrupted their ways: and not only forgot the promise of a Redeemer; but even sunk into a deplorable ignorance of the one true God; and plunged themselves into an endless variety of destructive errors, and fatal superstitions.

When they had thus degenerated into idolatry and wickedness, and were in no wise able to reform themselves; the preservation of their happiness manifestly required, that Providence should interpose in some extraordinary manner, to recall them to the knowledge of these necessary articles, and to awaken them into a sense of their duty. Accordingly we are informed in the course of this history, that God did actually interpose, “at sundry times, and in diverse manners,”^a for this purpose; and marvellously conducted, through a long period, two different kinds of administration together, adapted to the

^a Heb. i. 1.

two different parts of religion, which they were intended to restore.

But, as faith in God is the fundamental principle of all religion, so the first thing necessary to be done for the recovery of mankind, was to bring them back to the belief and acknowledgement of that first article, relating to his being and providence: “For he that cometh to God, must believe that he is; or exists; and that he is a rewarder of them, that diligently seek him¹.”

Conformably to this, the Scripture assures us, that those wonderful manifestations so frequently displayed in the first ages of the world, were chiefly designed to convince the nations, of the falshood and vanity of the opinions they had imbibed; and to render them sensible, that Jehovah, the author of those amazing wonders, was the only great and true God;—and consequently, that He alone was intitled to their service and obedience. And it is one principal part of my design in the following Discourses, to shew how wisely those wondrous manifestations

¹ Heb. xi. 6:

were contrived, and how properly they were adapted, to promote and accomplish the end in view:—to shew, how the doctrines and miracles conspired together, to dispel the darkness of superstition and idolatry; and to restore mankind to the clear knowledge of their God and Creator.

But besides this, and in conjunction with it, there runs through the Old Testament another scheme of divine administration, relative to the *second* article; admirably fitted to support the hopes, and to confirm the faith of those, who lived under that Testament, in the future advent of the promised Redeemer. This scheme has been so happily unfolded, and so fully explained by a late learned Prelate, in his Discourses on *The Use and Intent of Prophecy*, that I have only to observe, how effectually it answered the purpose of Providence; as it raised in the world a general expectation of the Messiah's coming; and prepared the people for the reception of their Lord.

When the world, and particularly that nation which was the grand depositary of

true religion; was so far enlightened by these administrations, as to be thoroughly convinced, that Jehovah was the only God; and that, “in remembrance of his mercy, he was about to raise up a mighty salvation for them, as he had spoken by the mouth of his holy prophets;” then it seems to be the proper time for the promised Redeemer to make his appearance, in order to instruct them in the will of God; and to direct them to those acts of real and substantial virtue, which are well-pleasing and acceptable to him.

And the event was exactly answerable. For the Gospel assures us, that Jesus Christ did accordingly appear “in the fulness of time;” the time appointed by the prophecies: that he made a clear and full declaration of God’s will to mankind; and established a more perfect institution of religion; the observance of which is to secure to us the favour of God; and to entitle us, through the merits of this blessed Redeemer,

* Luke i. 66. 70.

† Gal. iv. 4.

to the possession of eternal happiness. And it is another branch of my design to shew—how well the doctrines, which Christ delivered, were accommodated to the necessities, and fitted for the moral improvement, of the world: and also, how exquisitely the miracles he wrought, were adjusted to evince the truth of his doctrines: and consequently to shew, how fully both in conjunction prove him to be “that prophet, that should come into the world.”

These are the outlines of the plan, which I have formed for myself in the present undertaking; and which I shall endeavour gradually to fill up.

But to fill it up in a regular order, and set forth the several parts of it in their true and proper light; it will be requisite to look back to the creation of the world; to contemplate and consider the primitive state of mankind, and the provision that was originally made for their happiness. And if this provision, which God had established in the constitution of nature, and which he dispensed by the or-

“ John vi. 14.

dinary course of things, appears to have been suitable to the state and condition they were *then* in; we may reasonably presume, that all the subsequent dispensations of his providence, though frequently of an extraordinary and miraculous kind, were planned and conducted with equal wisdom; and were perfectly adapted to the various necessities, which they *afterwards* laboured under.

But indeed, we have something more than presumption, we have evident proof, to build upon. For, if we pursue the footsteps of mankind, as they passed through the several periods of the world; and examine the circumstances which they fell into from time to time; we shall find the dispensations, displayed at those times, and in reference to those circumstances, to have been as full fraught with wisdom, as they were with goodness: to have been entirely subservient to the grand purpose of human happiness: and subservient to it in the very ways and methods, which seem, of all others, the most proper to produce it.

This

This we shall hereafter endeavour to shew from a distinct consideration of particulars. Suffice it at present to observe, that the general view, which we have already taken of these dispensations, exhibits a strong, general proof of what we have advanced concerning them.

If mankind were so far sunk into ignorance and error, as to deify the several parts of nature, and “to worship the creatures instead of the Creator^{*} ;” what method more suitable, proper and reasonable, could the Almighty make use of, to convince them of their folly, and bring them back to the obedience of himself; than that of counteracting the laws of nature, and miraculously controuling its operations and effects?—whereby they might see, that to Him alone, as governor of the world, their veneration should, in prudence and justice, be directed. For in those times of idolatry, the chief point to be settled, was the supremacy of Jehovah, and his government of the world. And therefore the far greater number of the

^{*} Rom. i. 25.

miracles recorded in the Old Testament, are directly applied to *this* point: and, being awakening instances of terrible majesty, evidently prove—that the author of them was endowed with supreme power; could bend ~~the~~ course of nature to his will; and was therefore to be revered, as the Lord and Governor of the whole earth.

When we come to the times of the New Testament, we meet with miracles of a different kind; but no less properly adapted to the nature of the dispensation, which they were wrought to attest. Here God appears in milder majesty, instituting a religion of perfect purity, and boundless love. Correspondent therefore to the genius of this religion, the miracles performed for its support, are all miracles of mercy; which, at the same time that they demonstrate the truth, breath forth the very spirit and temper of the Gospel. For the good will therein revealed towards mankind, is every where exemplified by the miraculous benefits conferred upon them. And what can we conceive more rational, convincing and satisfactory, than,

than that such a dispensation—calculated to remove the disorders of the *soul*, and to advance it to a state of perfection—should be thus illustrated, confirmed and established, by miracles which consist in curing the analogous diseases of the *body*, and restoring it to perfect health?

Hence then may be discovered the weakness and futility of this boasted objection, “that miracles can be no witness either for God or men; nor are any proof either of divinity or revelation.” “For though,” say our adversaries; “innumerable miracles should assail the sense, and give the trembling soul no respite; though the sky should suddenly open, and all kinds of prodigies appear; voices be heard, or characters read; yet, what would this evince, but only that there were certain powers which could do all this? But what powers; whether one or more; whether superior or subaltern; mortal or immortal; wise or foolish; just or unjust; good or bad: this would still remain a mystery; as would the true intention, the

^y Characteristicks, vol. II. § 5. p. 331.

infallibility or certainty of whatever these powers asserted² .”

Now, in whatever state of mysteriousness or obscurity single miracles, considered apart, may leave these points involved; yet, miracles that run, as the Scripture-miracles do, in one connected chain, are completely adapted to clear them up. For by this combination, this bond of union that subsists between them, we may as easily trace the end and design of these extraordinary effects, as we can trace those of the ordinary works of nature. And if we find, as we do find, that they are all, though various, still coherent; that they are all subservient to similar ends of wisdom and goodness, with those that appear in the works of creation; that they all co-operate to one common, benevolent design, the production of human happiness; then surely, “we have sufficient reason to conclude, and to be convinced, that they are all the effects of *one* power—of one *superior* and *immortal* power—of one power, *wise*,

² Characteristics, vol. II. § 5. p. 333.

just, and *good*^a:" in a word, of *that* power, which first brought nature into being; which then wisely and graciously established laws for the happiness of his creatures; and which afterwards, at times, as wisely and graciously counteracted those laws, when it became necessary to their farther happiness.

Here therefore is a clear display—a full, irrefragable proof of *divine* power: and the *intention* of this power, in performing these marvellous works, is equally plain and obvious. For the nature of the miracles wrought, the relation they bear to the circumstances of things, and the suitableness they discover to certain ends, are as clear indications of what the Almighty intended in the performance of them; as the qualities and affections of natural bodies are indications of the design he had in view, when he produced those bodies into being.

With respect to the miracles, wrought in confirmation of particular doctrines, they are so exquisitely appropriated to the nature

^a BROWN'S *Essays on the Characteristics*. Essay III. § IV. p. 276.

of those doctrines, as to be often real exemplifications of them. They are, in many cases, the very doctrines reduced into acts. And the truth of such doctrines is as *certain* and *infallible*, as it is *unquestionable* and *certain* that the acts were performed.

Upon the whole; the proofs of *final* causes, and consequently the proofs of the *intention* of the Deity, are as visible in the proceedings that concern the *moral*, as in those that relate to the *natural* world. Natural bodies neither stand more properly ranged, nor operate more harmoniously to the ends of creation; than miracles do, to the purposes of revelation.

We see them springing up, just at the times, and exactly in the places, we might reasonably expect: we see them succeeding each other in a regular, connected order: we see them assuming various complexions, according to the various necessities and occasions, that called for them: we see them, completely answering those occasions and necessities; and thereby securing the happiness of the world. And seeing all this, can
we

we possibly doubt either the intent or propriety of them? can we possibly doubt of their being the genuine works of Him, “who is excellent in wisdom, as well as mighty in power;” and who, viewing the end from the beginning, “sweetly ordereth all the means^b,” that are necessary to promote and accomplish it?

If we should now try what effect it would have, to suppose the order of the miracles changed; this would be a farther illustration both of the propriety of them, and of the advantages resulting from their present situation^c. For which of the miracles exhibited to Pharaoh would have been to Adam, what the debasing of the serpent to the abject state of a reptile was—a standing security for the completion of his hopes, and a prelude to the final overthrow of his enemy?

To what purpose would the gift of languages have been conferred on the Israelites, secluded, as they were, from the converse and society of all foreign people?

^b Wisd. viii. 1.

^c ROTHERAM'S Sketch, &c. § iii. p. 23.

Or how would the power of defeating armies, and conquering nations by war, have promoted the establishment of the Gospel of peace? How would it have accorded with the genius and temper of that religion, whose end is to level all distinctions; to reduce mankind into one community; and to unite them in the bonds of charity and love?

In the places they are situated the miracles have all their use and beauty; the moment you transpose them, their lustre is tarnished: their serviceableness and propriety are no longer visible; but the whole becomes at once an useless and monstrous jumble of strange, confused, unmeaning exertions.

Finally, as the order and disposition of the miracles serve thus to illustrate and set forth their *propriety*; so do the circumstances under which they were exhibited, and the connection they maintain with the known natural state of the times, serve to prove their *truth* and *reality*. They make, in the history of those times, an essential part of the several events related: they are so intimately interwoven

woven with the natural occurrences, that they cannot be separated the one from the other, without violence: they are the auxiliaries of nature for the accomplishment of the divine purposes: they are indeed the very means that Providence made use of—and the only means that seem adapted—to work the reformation, and carry on the improvement of the world. Their existence therefore may be clearly deduced from the manifest *improvement*, which mankind are allowed to have made in religious knowledge and moral practice. In a word, the Jewish and Christian religions, the grand instruments of this improvement, were respectively founded on the Jewish and Christian miracles; without which, they could never have been established. Hence then, we are as sure, that these miracles were actually performed, and had a real existence; as we are sure, that these religions now subsist, and are professed in the world. And greater security than this, no man, I think, can reasonably desire.

But, notwithstanding the force of this evidence, the incredulity of the present age has

has not only dared to call in question the *reality* of these miracles; but has proceeded so far, as even to deny the *possibility* of them. The validity of the reasonings, by which our adversaries would fain reject them, I shall bring to the test in my next Discourse. In the mean time, convinced as we are, that “the foundation of God standeth sure^d;” that the religion which he established by such a train of miracles, is infallibly true and divine; let us seriously attend to its important doctrines; and diligently endeavour to frame our lives according to its wise and excellent precepts. Let us sedately reflect, that the great end of all true religion, and more particularly of the Christian religion, is to reform its professors from vice and immorality; and to render them “zealous of good works^e.” When it influences our conduct in this manner, the benevolent design of our Lord in revealing it, and the great intention of God in the miraculous attestation he has been pleased to give it, is effectually com-

^d 2 Tim. ii. 19.

^e Tit. ii. 14.

pleted. Our salvation is begun; as, by the forsaking of our sins, the causes of our misery are removed. “And being made free from sin^f,” the higher we advance in piety and goodness, the better we shall be disposed for the enjoyment of that happiness, which God has prepared for them that obey him. To whom, with the Son and Holy Ghost, be ascribed all honour, adoration and praise, &c. *Amen.*

^f Rom. vi. 18.

S E R-

S E R M O N III.

GEN. xviii. 14.

Is any thing too hard for the Lord?

AS miracles are such clear, positive and direct proofs of the truth of revelation; it is no wonder, that the patrons of infidelity should labour so industriously, in every age, to decry, explode and reject them. But of all the attempts that were ever made in any age to this purpose; one of the most subtle, as well as the most insolent, is that of a certain modern writer; who not only presumes to question the reality, but magisterially denies the possibility of miracles: who pronounces them to be in their own nature utterly incredible; and, when produced in support of any religious system, to be more

properly a subject of derision than of argument^s.

But how light and ridiculous soever this subject may appear in the apprehension of our fastidious author; it has certainly too much weight, strength and stability to be puffed away by the mere arrogance of an insulting sarcasm. It is a serious subject, and admits of argument. And therefore we shall assume the confidence, notwithstanding his scoffs, to argue the point with this contemptuous adversary: not indeed with any view of working the conviction of so prejudiced a person; but in hopes of securing the better disposed, but less learned, from being led away by the sophistry of his reasonings.

And to this end, I shall endeavour to prove, in direct opposition to the general design and avowed purport of his Tenth Essay,

That miracles are so far from being in their own nature either impossible or incredible; that, on the contrary, there is strong pre-

^s HUME's Essays, vol. II. § x. on Miracles, p. 139. 8vo. Ed. 1767.

sumption,

sumption, nay, irrefragable evidence of their having been actually performed; and performed too in support and attestation of revealed religion.

In discussing these points I shall proceed as the nature of the subject directs; and attempt, in the

First place, to evince and demonstrate the *possibility* of miracles.

The Almighty, when he created this visible world, disposed the parts of it in such order, and impressed upon them such motions, as were adapted to accomplish the gracious ends, which he proposed to himself in the creation of it. Now, as these ends, he foresaw, were in general attainable by one uniform mode of proceeding; so he determined, that a constant succession of effects should uniformly proceed from their respective causes, according to certain stated rules. These rules, which natural bodies observe in their operations, are commonly called the *laws of nature*. But the laws of nature are in reality the laws of God: that is, they are nothing else but the *modes of acting*, which

the wisdom of the Deity has prescribed to his power, in the preservation and government of the natural world. For matter, having no self-determining principle, is, properly speaking, capable of no law. Being in itself inert and passive, it can only act, as it is acted upon. And therefore the course of the material world stands in need of the same power to continue it on, as was necessary at first to put it in motion. And indeed, such power is constantly employed upon it. For the principle of *gravitation*, the most extensive and operative principle in nature, is evidently no other than the continual agency of God^b.

Since the course of nature, then, is nothing else but that continued uniform manner, in which God produces certain effects according to his own wisdom; and since this manner of acting depends entirely upon his wisdom; he may at any time, if he sees fit, as easily alter it, as he may continue it: in other

^b NEWTONI Principia, &c. lib. III. prop. XLII. schol. gen. See also MACKLAURIN'S Account of Sir I. NEWTON'S Discoveries, b. IV. ch. IX. § 1. 5. 6. 13. and PRICE'S Dissert. on Providence, § 2.

words, he may as easily work a miracle, and “perform a *new* thingⁱ” in the earth, as he may persevere in the *old*, common way, and keep things on in their ordinary course. For the ordinary and extraordinary are equally in his power, and equally subject to his will and controul. For no man will contend, that it requires more or greater power to stop or alter the motions of the planets, than it does to carry them round in their orbits. No man will contend, that it requires a greater power to deluge the earth, or to divide the sea, than it did at first to create them; and does still to preserve them in their present state. No man will contend, that it requires a greater power to restore life to a body when dead, than to give life to a body that before never lived. Or, if any one should be disposed to contend these points; yet he cannot deny, but that infinite power is able to perform them.

Hence then it follows, that miracles are *possible*; that the Ruler of the world *may* counteract the laws, or alter the course of it,

ⁱ Numb. xvi. 30.

when he sees proper. But when it may be proper for him to act in such a manner, we are not always competent judges. This however we may judge, that in general and common cases, he will always act according to the general and common course of things: as that course will be sufficient to answer the great and ultimate end of all his actions—the production of the common and general good.

But, to come to my *second* point,

If any *extraordinary* occasions should arise, which require extraordinary provisions; then it is *probable* that he will make those provisions for them in some extraordinary way: that is, he will *probably* perform miracles. For MIRACLES ARE EXTRAORDINARY EFFECTS PRODUCED UPON EXTRAORDINARY OCCASIONS. And that such occasions *may* arise, both in the natural and moral world, 'tis an easy matter to conceive. In the natural world, the *attraction* of bodies may bring on such irregularities, as can no otherwise be adjusted, than by the hand of Him who first formed it^k. And in the moral

^k NEWTON'S Optics, Query 31. p. 378.

world,

world, the *corruption* of free agents may occasion such enormities, as can only be rectified by the interposition of Providence.

In such circumstances therefore, where it seems necessary that God, both as preserver and governor of the world, *should* interpose for its support and welfare ; it is very probable he *may* have interposed : and more especially in matters relating to true religion. For since he is peculiarly concerned for the happiness, and, as the means of it, for the moral improvement, of mankind ; if men, by a wrong use of their liberty, should plunge themselves into vice and wretchedness : if, in that state of ignorance and error, instead of being able to recover themselves, they should continually sink into still worse and worse condition : what can you conceive more *probable*, than that God should interpose, by some signal act of his providence, to reclaim them to the practice of virtue and religion ; and thereby restore them to the capacity of attaining that happiness, for which they were originally designed ?

If real piety and moral virtue, with the religious knowledge that is necessary to them, are objects worthy of the divine attention; and if these were in danger of perishing utterly out of the world; “why should it be thought a thing incredible, that God” should commission proper persons to republish the doctrines, and enforce the duties of religion and morality, with clear and express authority? This commission of the prophets would be in itself miraculous: but then the miracle would not appear openly to the world: and therefore some *other* miracles, *obvious* and *sensible*, would be necessary to attest its truth. Superior knowledge and virtue are not alone sufficient to characterize a prophet. He must also “do such things, as no man can do, except God were with him,” before his prophetic character will be established, and himself be acknowledged as a divine teacher¹. And therefore we may conclude, that every prophet, employed upon any extraordinary message, would be endowed with this power of

¹ See Dr. ADAMS's Essay on Miracles, p. 33.

working miracles, as well in confirmation of his own mission, as in support of the doctrines he had in charge to teach^m.

And if it should appear from the history of the world, that such good ends have in fact been answered by them: if it should appear, for example, that religion and morality, when just expiring, had been revived by the help of these miracles; had been established among several nations; and in a way likely to gain farther ground: this will be a strong presumption in their favour. And if it should farther appear, that there is no other assignable cause, which could bring about this great event, but the miracles recorded to have been wrought for the purpose; this will be a good proof, that they *were* accordingly wrought; and actually performed with that intentionⁿ.

What a strange conduct therefore must it be in our adversary, to allow that “miracles may be *possible*; nay, and *probable* too; provided they have nothing to do with religion.”

^m STILLINGFLEET'S Origin. Sacrae, b. II. ch. vi. § 15.

ⁿ ADAMS'S Essay, p. 34.

For where should we expect them to be employed, but on objects worthy of them? And what objects can we conceive of such dignity and importance, as those which religion exhibits? If God then can be thought to have any regard for the things that concern the transient enjoyments of this *mortal* life; how much greater attention may he be supposed to pay to the things that respect our *immortal* state? But these are the things of religion: the things that make for the supreme interest of mankind, through time, and through eternity. From hence then, from the dignity and importance of their design, there arises a *peculiar* presumption in favour of such miracles, as are said to have been wrought in support of religion °.

“No, says the infidel;” and retorts upon us—“if there be any presumption, that miracles were wrought in *former* times; to support the doctrines, and enforce the practice of true religion; there must subsist, of course, an equal presumption, that they would still

• CAMPBELL's Dissertation on Miracles, § V. p. 89, &c.
Bp. BUTLER's Anal. of Religion, pt. ii. ch. ii. p. 243, &c.

be performed in our *own* times, for the same ends—because religion and morality want still to be propagated,—still to be enforced in the world. And since it is certain, that God performs no miracles *now* for that purpose; the presumption is, from the rules of analogy, that he *never* did perform any.”

Now, in answer to this, let it here be observed, that it is in no wise necessary, as the inference would suppose, to keep always to the same method, in order to accomplish the same end. We learn from the constitution of nature, that it requires far greater care, pains and trouble, to settle, strengthen, and establish things at *first*, than it does *afterwards* to preserve and support them: in time indeed, they may be able to preserve and support themselves. Hence then, if no miracles are wrought at present for the propagation of religion, the reason is plain—religion may be propagated without them. And God will never be so lavish of his power, as to make use of extraordinary means,

means,

60. S E R M O N III.

means, when common and ordinary ones are found sufficient.

But though common and ordinary means are sufficient *now*; yet, in the *beginning* they were not so. For true religion, like a tender plant, required, when first set in the earth, to be watered and nourished with the dew of heaven; without which it would have withered away. It required to be guarded with constant care; to be defended from all annoyances; and to be fortified against the violence of all the storms, that might fall and beat upon it. It required therefore the peculiar attention of Providence, and the signal exertion of his mighty arm: that is, it required miracles to be wrought in its favour, in order both to promote its success, and to secure its establishment in the world. When afterwards, in consequence of such miraculous interpositions, “it had taken root, and filled the land^r,” when it had been widely diffused, and sufficiently established among the nations; then indeed might it safely be left to preserve itself; and to make its way

^r Psalm lxxx. 9.

by its own strength, without any special assistance.

This is the conclusion we are led to form from the analogy of nature; and is a conclusion that stands fully confirmed by the evidence of facts. For if experience tells us, that God *now* acts in the affairs of religion according to the *natural* course of things: and, having committed it to the care and management of its professors, leaves it to the influence and result of their conduct: so history assures us, on the other hand, that in *ancient* times he acted in a *different* manner; that he watched over religion with a providential eye; attended to its various states and conditions; and, as occasions required, succoured, supported, strengthened, established it by frequent and *supernatural* displays of his power. Which brings me, in the

Third place, To prove the *reality* and *certainty* of miracles.

There are two religions now in the world—the *Jewish* and the *Christian*—which, though they sprung up under the most unpromising

promising aspect, yet made their way with surprising success. If we compare the genius of these religions with the temper and dispositions of the times, we shall find that they contain nothing, that was particularly adapted to engage the *affections*, but much that might easily excite the *aversion*, of a loose and degenerate world. For the burdensome ceremonies of the former were no less ungrateful to the *indolence*, than the sublime purity of the latter was to the *corruption*, of depraved nature. But, notwithstanding the prejudices that lay against them, and the opposition that was made to them, these religions still prevailed; and gained, in their day, an extensive reception among mankind. But by what means did they gain it? Not by natural, but by supernatural means: by the help of the miracles, that were publicly performed to attest their truth. These miracles the people saw; and believed the revelations confirmed by them. And this their professed belief of the one, is an irrefragable proof of the reality of the other.

But

But this evidence will appear in a stronger light, if we consider the relation, which these miracles bear to the state and circumstances of the times; and the connection they maintain with the known situation of things. When we examine the miracles recorded by heathen authors, we cannot but observe, that they are all detached events, and properly make no part of the history; since the same series of affairs might be carried on, and the same ends be accomplished, as well without the interposition of them, as with it: and therefore may conclude, that they were purposely introduced, either to enliven a dull narration, or to answer some base, political design. But the Scripture-miracles are of a different stamp. They plainly constitute an *essential* part of the several events related: and are so intimately interwoven with the natural occurrences, that they cannot be separated from them. They all work to some rational; important end; and come in, opportunely, to assist and strengthen the weakness of nature, in order to bring that end about. Take away the assistance of miracles, in the
cases

cases they are said to have been wrought, and you will instantly perceive, that nature *must* sink under the weight of the transactions; and that, her powers being unequal to the work, the œconomy of the times must come to a dead stand. Miracles only could carry it on: nor is there any such thing, as proceeding scarce a step without them.

Place the *Jews*, as they *were* placed, in *Egypt*; and ~~who~~ will you bring them out, against the will of their tyrannical masters, unless by a miracle performed in their favour? Then, observe their embarrassment at the *Red sea*; and think, how it is possible, without *another* miracle, to deliver them from the fury of their enraged enemies, and land them safe on the opposite shore? Attend them afterwards in their journeyings through the wilderness, for the space of forty years; and how were they to be sustained, for so long a time, in that barren desert, without a series of *constant* miracles? Then, bring them to the borders of the land of *Canaan*; and how, I beseech you, could they possibly expel the inhabitants of this land, and get possession

possession of it themselves, without the assistance of his arm, “who ruleth over all the kingdoms of the earth,” and disposeth of them “according to the purpose of his own will?” Here therefore He introduced them; and here He protected them, whilst they “kept his statutes, and observed his laws.”

But the *Jewish* law was only an introduction to that nobler institution, which was established by Christ, as the other had been by Moses, on the foundation of appropriate miracles. For what but the *reality* of the miracles, which our Saviour performed in proof of his doctrines, could prevail on such a number of people, naturally prejudiced the contrary way, to become his disciples; and, under the weight and pressure of so many hardships, steadily to embrace and profess his religion? And what but the *reality* of the miracles, which these disciples again were enabled to work, could so effectually recommend it to the acceptance of others? For many and many others did accept and embrace it, on the evidence of the miracles, which *they* saw performed in at-

testation of it: and thereby declared to the world, that they were fully convinced of the *truth* and *certainty* of those miracles. And this their declaration ought to be credited: not only as the testimony of so many witnesses should in reason be deemed valid; but as it also supplies us with a clear and satisfactory account of events, which otherwise are unaccountable^a. For admit the miracles to be true; and all the events, recorded both in the *Old* and *New* Testament, are just what we should have expected to follow: but reject them as false; and we are instantly involved in difficulties and perplexities; and obliged at last to believe things, in their own nature, much more incredible, or, as our author speaks, “much more miraculous, than even the miracles themselves.”

But all this, it is said, stands upon testimony: “and no testimony for any kind of miracle can ever amount to a *probability*, much less to a *proof*; or even supposing it amounted to a proof, it would be opposed by another proof, derived from the very na-

^a See BUTLER'S Analogy, part II. chap. vii. p. 352, &c.

ture of the fact which it would endeavour to establish. 'Tis experience only which gives authority to human testimony ; and 'tis the same experience, which assures us of the laws of nature. When, therefore, these two kinds of experience (observe the words) are *contrary*, we have nothing to do but subtract the one from the other, and embrace an opinion, either on one side or the other, with that assurance, which arises from the remainder. But, according to the principle here explained, this subtraction, with regard to all popular religions, amounts to an intire annihilation : and therefore we may establish it as a maxim, that no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle ; and make it a just foundation for any such system of religion ^r."

This is the mighty argument, by which Mr. Hume would overturn at once all the miracles recorded in Scripture. But this, in truth, is so far from being an *argument*, that it is nothing more than down-right sophistry ; the most fallacious reasoning that was

^r HUME's Essays, vol. II. § 10. p. 144.

ever used. And the fallacy lies in this:—that he takes the proofs from testimony in support of miracles, and the proofs from experience in support of the established course of nature, to be direct *contrary* proofs: whereas, in reality, they have no relation to each other; but respect quite different facts. The uniformity of nature is in no wise contradicted by the supposition of miracles. Nay, by supposing the facts in question to be miraculous, the uniformity of nature is preserved, and the facts are accounted for upon another principle entirely consistent with it*. All that common experience proves, is, that there is a settled course of nature; and that, in *common* and *ordinary* cases, things proceed according to this settled course. But with regard to *extraordinary* occasions, experience can determine nothing. For *them*, we must have recourse to the history of the times in which they happened; and see what the men of those times have related and vouched concerning them: and if we find that they una-

* Dr. ADAMS's Essay, p. 17.

nimously

nimously testify, that on such *extraordinary* occasions *extraordinary* or *miraculous* things were performed; miracles truly worthy of God, and suitable to the necessities that called for them; then are we bound in reason to receive this their testimony “with full assurance of faith.” I say, with *full* assurance; because there is nothing that can tend to diminish it. For it is in the highest degree absurd, to talk of *subtracting* the evidence of experience from the evidence of this testimony—since they are evidences of different facts, and therefore incapable of being compared together^t.

^t “If miracles, says Bishop BUTLER, must be compared to any thing in nature, they should not be compared to common natural events, or to events, which, though uncommon, are similar to what we daily experience; but to the extraordinary phenomena of nature. And then the comparison will be between the presumption against miracles, and the presumption against such uncommon appearances—Upon which he concludes, that there is certainly no such presumption against miracles, as to render them in any wise incredible: that, on the contrary, our being able to discern reasons for them, gives a positive credibility to the history of them, in cases where those reasons hold.” Analogy, part II. ch. ii. p. 245, &c. See also Dr. PRICE’s Dissert. on Historical Evidence and Miracles.

But if our author should fail to make the *subtraction* in this form; he is resolved, however, to make it in another. And therefore tells us, “that there is not to be found, in all history, any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestioned good sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves; of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to lose, in case of being detected in any falshood; and, at the same time, attesting facts, performed in such a public manner, and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable: all which circumstances, he says, are requisite to give us a full assurance in the testimony of men^u.”

Very well. And have not *all* these requisites been over and over shewn to concur in support of the Scripture-miracles? These

^u HUME's Essays ubi supra.

miracles “were not done in a corner^x.” they did not make their first appearance in such a place as Paphlagonia, a land of barbarity and dulness; where our author’s favourite, Alexander, the impostor, began his feats; but they shone forth in the most celebrated parts of the world, and at the most celebrated periods. Egypt, Phœnicia, and Canaan saw them, believed and trembled: Babylon, Jerusalem, Athens, Rome and Corinth were all eye-witnesses of them; and stand upon record as vouchers for their truth and certainty. Nor were they only performed in such renowned places, but they were also performed in direct opposition to the prejudices and interest of the most renowned and powerful in those places. They were performed before the most vigilant, acute and malicious enemies; who vigorously exerted all their industry, skill and sagacity in the examination of them; and who, if they had been false, would certainly have detected the imposture. The testimony given to these miracles, was given in the

^x Acts xxvi. 26.

same places, and in the same public manner, by an infinite number of men: men of cool reason and sound judgement; neither heated by enthusiasm, nor fired by ambition; but sedate in their conduct, and humble in their pursuits: men, who were uniform in their account of things; and who, not only “took joyfully the spoiling of their goods,” but patiently endured all the hardships of persecution and death, for the sake of what they attested: and consequently men, who thereby gave to the world the highest proof, that could possibly be given *by men*, of the truth and fidelity of their testimony?

Nor is it any diminution of the force of this argument, or any prejudice to the cause it maintains, that miracles have been forged, and strenuously supported by persons of other religions. “The forgeries of this sort, which have been imposed upon mankind in all ages, are so far from weakening the credibility of the Jewish and Christian miracles, that they strengthen it. For how could we account for a practice so universal, of forging mi-

” Heb. x. 34.

acles for the support of false religions; if, on some occasions, they had not actually been wrought for the confirmation of a true one? or, how is it possible, that so many spurious copies should pass upon the world, without some genuine original from which they were drawn, whose known existence and tried success might give an *appearance* of probability to the counterfeit? Now, of all the miracles of antiquity, there are none that can *pretend* to the character of originals, but those of the Old and New Testament; which, though the oldest by far of all others now recorded in the world, have yet maintained their credit to this day, through the perpetual opposition and scrutiny of ages; whilst all the rival productions of fraud and craft have long ago been successively exploded, and sunk into utter contempt.—An event that cannot reasonably be ascribed to any other cause, but to the natural force and effect of truth; which, though defaced for a time by the wit, or depressed by the power, of man, is sure still to triumph

triumph in the end over all the false mimicry of art, and the vain efforts of human policy ^z.”

Now to God the Father, &c.

^z Dr. MIDDLETON's Letter from Rome, Pref. Discourse, p. 88.

S E R M O N IV.

GEN. iii. 14, 15.

*And the Lord God said unto the serpent,
Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed
above all cattle, and above every beast of the
field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust
shalt thou eat all the days of thy life.*

*And I will put enmity between thee and the
woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it
shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise
his heel.*

HAVING already proved in a former
Discourse, that the great Ruler of the
world might, if he saw fit, counteract or
alter the course of nature; and, that it was
probable

probable he would accordingly do it, if the happiness of his creatures should ever call for such alterations; it becomes our business now to inquire,

Whether the circumstances of mankind were ever such, as to stand in need of miraculous interpositions?

And if they were,

Whether the miracles, recorded to have been done, were properly adapted in their nature and kind, to the necessities and occasions of such circumstances?

If these two points can be rationally established, the usefulness and propriety of the Scripture-miracles will appear in a conspicuous light. And, if the internal characters of usefulness and propriety may with justice be attributed to them; we are then furnished, not only with an additional presumption in favour of their credibility, but with a sufficient answer to the principal objections urged against it. For most of the objections, which infidels have raised against these miracles, are ultimately founded on their supposed inutility, impropriety, or unreason-

reasonableness. And all this unbelievers are pleased to suppose of them, because they view them in a detached light; in an unconnected state; and independent of the occasions that gave rise to them. Whereas, if these sceptics were seriously to examine the moral circumstances of mankind, through the several periods of the world; they would find great and frequent necessities for some signal interpositions to be made on their behalf, for the recovery, or the improvement, of their happiness. And if they were duly to consider the nature and tendency of those interpositions, which are said to have been made; they would see reason, and good reason, to admire the wisdom with which they are adapted to the ends proposed: and hence might haply be induced to acknowledge the hand of the Almighty in them; and from this acknowledgement might be farther led to praise and adore him with humble gratitude, as well for his extraordinary, as for his ordinary works.

Let us therefore conduct them through these scenes; and try if we can contribute any

any thing to their conviction, by pointing out the intent and propriety of the several miracles, in the order they arise, and present themselves to us.

In the beginning of the world, there seems to have been no occasion for any miracles; and therefore we read of none. For, as man was created in a state of uprightness, purity and innocence; he had nothing else to do to secure his happiness and the divine favour, but to persevere himself in that state, by “walking uprightly with his God.” The circumstances of this condition, at this time, required only a proper rule of life, to direct him to such things as were perfectly agreeable to the divine will, and consequently beneficial to himself; and to guard him from the contrary, or things that were hurtful. And such a rule, we find, he had. For, as he held frequent and familiar communication with the Deity; had probably the *Shechinah*, the symbol of the divine presence, continually before his eyes, to which he might resort on every occasion^a; so he received from

^a WINDER’S Hist. of Knowl. vol. I. ch. iii. § 2. TAYLOR’S Sch. of Script. Divinity, ch. xiv.

thence,

thence, as from a “lively oracle,” a just and sufficient information of things; and was accordingly directed either to the use or forbearance of them^b. As long as he continued to follow this direction, so long he continued in a happy state. Upon this plan, he could know no evil; for God would direct him to that which was good—and to that only: and he was always at hand, ready to give him the needful directions.

During this period then, whilst man obeyed the commands of God, and acted suitably to the end of his creation; nothing more seems to have been necessary to maintain the welfare and happiness of the world, (nor does any thing more seem indeed to have been done for that purpose) than to preserve the whole in its original state; and to conduct it onwards according to its natural, established course.

How long this happy period lasted, we know not: nor is it indeed material we should. But this we are sure of, that a vast

^b Gen. i. 28—30. Ibid. ii. 16, 17. Ibid. 23, 24, comp. with Mat. xix. 5. Mar. x. 7. 1 Cor. vi. 16.

and momentous change was, in process of time, superinduced on the world by the transgression of our first parents: and this change, in the nature and constitution of things, occasioned as great and stupendous a change in the mode of divine government. It was introduced thus—*Satan*, moved perhaps with envy at the happiness of our progenitors in paradise, “took occasion from the commandment——YEA, HATH GOD SAID, &c.” to “deceive them; and thereby slew them^d:” that is, robbed them of their innocence; and brought them to a state of misery and death.

Such was the transaction in general: but it makes too considerable a part of our subject to be dismissed in such general terms; and therefore we shall descend to particulars. To effect his design then, the seducer assumed the body of a serpent^e—a creature of great

^c Gen. iii. 1.

^d Rom. vii. 11.

^e That the serpent was the visible instrument of seduction is evident; and yet, that the tempter was more than a serpent, even

great subtilty ; and at that time of a noble form ; far superior to that which he bears at present. *This*, how little soever we may have attended to it, the Scripture has been careful to apprize us of : for in the account before us, he is twice reckoned, and expressly reckoned among the *beasts*^f, in plain contradistinction to *reptiles*. And his sagacity, recorded as well known to man, seems also

even a reasonable, but wicked Being, is no less evident. Herein all antiquity seems to have been agreed : and several traces of this account are still to be seen in profane authors. To the instances which Bishop STILLINGFLEET has produced in his *Orig. Sacr.* b. iii. ch. iii. § 17, 18. many others might easily be added—What is *Abariman*, the name of the evil *dæmon* among the *Persians*, but חַבָּרִים *Habaram*, the *subtle one*, mentioned in this history.† or, to express it more fully, What is Ἀεὶμάνης, or Ἀεὶμάνου of the *Greeks*, but the חַבָּרִים נָחָשׁ *Harum Nachash*, the *subtle serpent* of *Moses* ? And whence came the account, so frequent in heathen authors, of their *heroes*, the friends and protectors of mankind, being bit by *serpents*, and generally in the *heel*, but from the close of this history, as applied to the *Messiah* ?—PHILO *Judæus* seems to me to have been the first author that ever thought of reducing this history to an allegory or parable. The various opinions of Jews and Christians on this subject may be seen together in RIVINI *Dissert. de Serpente Seducatore. Lipsiæ*, 1686.

^f Gen. iii. 1 and 14.

to imply, that he was familiar with man ; and therefore a fitter instrument of deception ^g.

The scene lies near the forbidden tree ; of whose fruit, it is evident, from the tenour of the narration, the woman saw the serpent eat : and to his eating of it (assured as she was of its being the tree of *knowledge*) she attributed those perfections of speech and reason, with which she perceived him to be now endowed : and therefore, was not surpris'd. Under the advantage of this notion he assaults the woman, and invites *her* to eat likewise : but she refused, it seems, even to touch it. Upon this refusal the serpent insults her with the following question ; What, you refuse then to eat of this tree, because God hath said, ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden ^h ?” obliquely insinuating, that God was not so gracious and beneficent as they might think him ; since he had with-held such excellent and super-

^g MEDE'S Works, b. i. disc. XL. p. 224.

^h Gen. iii. 1.

lative fruit from themⁱ. To this the woman, vindicating the benevolence and goodness of God, answers—"We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die^k." This apprehension of death the serpent, or rather the tempter through the serpent, treats as an idle and weak notion; and accordingly said unto the woman, "ye shall not surely die^l." "You may be certain from what you see in me, who have eaten of it, not to my hurt, but much to my advantage, that death is not the consequence; and therefore cannot be the true reason, why you are forbidden it. If you are at a loss to understand, why God, when the tree is not destructive, should yet forbid you to eat of it; I will be so far your friend, as to acquaint you with the real secret—And it is this: God would keep you in subjection to himself; and therefore with-holds it from

ⁱ Vide Targ. in Gen. iii. 4.

^k Gen. iii. 2, 3.

^l Ib. 4.

you,' "because he knows, that in the day ye eat thereof, you will become your own masters: then your eyes will be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil^m." Here indeed the woman ought in duty to have consulted God; but the argument, you may observe, was so artfully framed, as effectually to prevent her applying to him: for she could never think of consulting a Being, whom she suspected of imposing upon herⁿ. She was consequently left to the workings of her own mind; and to determine the point by her own judgment. And the result was, as we might naturally expect, that, "when the woman saw," from the serpent's experiment, "that the tree was good for food;" and from her own observation, "that it was pleasant to the eyes; and;" from the same serpent's account, "that it was a tree to be desired to make one wise;— she took of the fruit thereof— and did eat."

^m Gen. iii. 5. "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."

ⁿ See Abp. KING's Sermon on the Fall of man, at the end of "Origin of Evil." LAW's Edition.

^o Gen. iii. 6.

Thus fell Eve, beguiled by the serpent. Adam, it should seem, fell in another manner. For in the apology, which he afterwards makes to God, he uses these words—
“ the woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat^p :”
plainly, I think, intimating, that the strong affection, which God had planted in his breast towards her; and strengthened by the command, that “ he should cleave unto her^q ;” had prompted and disposed him “ to obey her voice^r,” and to share her fate.

And what is there now in this account of the *fall*, that is either absurd, irrational, or incredible? Are not the wisest of the sons of Eve, and those more especially who laugh the loudest at this story, continually deceived by the like methods? And is not their disobedience an exact copy of the first sin? But, we are not so much concerned to bring examples to explain the manner, as we are to

^p Gen. iii. 12.

^q Gen. ii. 24.

^r Gen. iii. 17.

consider the effect and consequence, of this first transgression.

And here we see at one dismal view the whole world defaced^s, and man, the lord of the world, entirely ruined, by it. His title to the favour of God became extinct with his innocence; and the same act, that lost him his happiness, exposed him to the penalty of misery. In this state of accumulated distress—deprived of his innocence, perfection and felicity; and subjected to all the miseries of mortality—where, or to whom, could he look for relief? He had no help in himself: and the majesty of God was no longer an object of comfort, but, on the contrary, of dismay and of terror to him^t. Having no delight, no confidence in God, there could be no place for religion. And if religion once failed amidst all the miseries that crowded upon him; his next wish must certainly be, that life might fail him also.

Hence then it appears, that our distressed progenitor must inevitably sink, unless sup-

^s Gen. iii. 17, 18,

^t Ibid, 10.

ported by some rational hope: by the hope of recovering, at least in part, what he had lost by his transgression. But this hope could be given him only by that Being against whom he had transgressed. And therefore if God had mercy in store; if he intended to preserve and relieve the offender; it was absolutely necessary, that he should reveal so much of his intention to him, as might be sufficient to animate him with the hope of reconciliation, and excite his endeavours to better obedience. For, otherwise, he would have concluded, that God had rejected him; and, in consequence thereof, would have either languished in a fruitless inactivity, or else have proceeded (which is the most likely) with the same desperation as the fallen angels.

Now, the promise then made, that “the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head”^u was made directly with this intent; and manifestly conveyed such hopes to him. For, if we consider the genius of the *Hebrew* language, the circumstances of man’s situa-

^u Gen. iii. 15.

tion at that time, and the instrument by which the tempter worked his seduction, misery, and ruin; we shall soon be convinced, that his restoration and recovery could hardly be expressed (preserving the reference to the manner of his *fall*) in more lively and comprehensive terms.

Nor could Adam fail of drawing this meaning from them. He knew full well, at this juncture, that his *fall* was the *victory* of the serpent; whom he had now discovered, by his own experience, to be an enemy to God and man. From this discovery he might be led to conclude, that the serpent was not the real agent; but some evil spirit, which had taken possession of the serpent's body. And in this conclusion he must needs be confirmed by the sentence he heard denounced against him. For it was directed to an intelligent and free agent; to one who had committed a crime, which a brute creature was not capable of committing; and had incurred a punishment, which a mere passive instrument could not incur. Hence then he could not but infer, that the true
object

object of the divine vengeance was the evil spirit, which had committed the offence². And as soon as ever he comprehended this, it was an easy matter to deduce the rest. The *head* was another word for *power*; and so used in his own language: and therefore he could not but understand, that to “*bruise the head of the serpent,*” was to *destroy* the *power* of that evil spirit, which had actuated the organs of this creature, to his seduction and misery. Hereupon his hopes would naturally revive. For the destruction of the power of his adversary, evidently implied a deliverance from those evils, which that power had brought him under: and by consequence, a recovery of those blessings, which he had forfeited by the *fall*. And this was a sufficient foundation (which was all that the necessity of his case required) for trust and confidence in God; and a sufficient encouragement to the exercise of religion, and to a steadfast obedience for the time to come. I say, “steadfast obedience:” because he must be sensible, that the happiness lost by sin,

² Revel. exam. with Candour, vol. I. Diss. v. p. 59, &c.

could

could only be recovered by the return of righteousness.

But, notwithstanding this promise, or rather prophecy, was so full and express; yet our anxious progenitor (especially when he found that it was to take place in one of his *posterity*) might stand in need, and in great need, of some sign or miracle to assure him of its completion; and to comfort him with the thoughts, that it carried a reference also to himself. We have in Scripture frequent instances of *faithful* men requiring some miraculous signs by way of security for the accomplishment of divine promises; and we have as frequent instances of God's indulgence to their weakness in granting them such signs^y. And would not the same solicitude, the same anxious infirmity, that prompted these men to make such requests, in *later* and more *experienced* times, about things at no great distance; prompt our first parent, with still greater force, to make the like request on this *first* promise? A promise,

^y See Gen. xv. 8--xxiv. 14. Ex. iii. 11, 12. Judg. vi. 17. 37. 2 Kings xx. 8--11.

which,

which, possibly, he might never live to see accomplished.

In all this there appears to be nothing, but what is extremely natural; unless you would rather suppose, that God was so gracious as to anticipate his wishes. But, whether requested or spontaneously offered, here is, as it seems necessary there should be, a very signal miracle performed; and most admirably adjusted to the tenour of the prophecy. God had said, that “the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head.” In proof of what he had said, he now devoted the serpent to destruction; stripped him of all his pride and pre-eminence of form; and degraded him to the abject state of a reptile. This miraculous infliction plainly pointed out to what the promise tended; and exhibited a kind of visible security for the accomplishment of the hopes it imparted. For when Adam, on that promise of victory over the serpent, beheld him thus instantly humbled and debased; would he not readily admit this present, initial degradation of his enemy, as a significant prelude

lude to—would he not naturally esteem it, as a comfortable pledge of, his future and final overthrow? And must he not joyfully conclude, that the virtue of the prophecy was intended to reach and benefit himself, when he saw it thus beginning to operate, as soon as it was communicated to him? Truly, one would be apt to think, that he broke out into the like grateful acclamation at this sight, as Simeon uttered at the sight of Christ: “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace—for mine eyes have seen thy salvation².”

This promise then, confirmed and illustrated by its attendant miracle, was excellently adapted to the wants and necessities of fallen man; and communicated to him such hopes of salvation, as might encourage him to exercise a reasonable religion. But here it is to be observed, that the religion of a *sinner* must be very different from that of an *innocent* man. . . . And therefore we find, that there was now a change, and a remarkable change, made in the form of Adam’s devo-

² Luke. ii. 29, 30.

tion and worship, suited to the change which had happened in his circumstances: or, in other words, that there was a new institution of religion established. And this new institution it concerns us particularly to look into; because it lies at the root, and runs through all the branches, of the divine œconomy; through all the dispensations of religion from that to the present time.

It is clear from the words of the prophecy, that sin was not to be *freely* forgiven; but required an atonement to be made for it: that the serpent could not be conquered, nor the mischiefs of the fall repaired, but by “the sufferings of the woman’s seed—” by having “his heel bruised.” What this phrase of “bruising the heel” might precisely mean, we have not at present sufficient instances in the *Hebrew* language to ascertain. In a kindred language however, that is, the *Arabic*; the root, from whence the word *קָדַם*, viz. *heel*, is derived, signifies among other things, to “suffer for sin—” and also, to “die,” or “suffer death.”

* Vide CASTELL. Lexic. Hept. in radice *קָדַם*.

And

And if Adam understood it in this sense; or if God now declared to him (what was afterwards well known to his posterity) that “without shedding of blood there was no remission^b;” then we see plainly the use and propriety of that institution, I mean *animal sacrifice*, which we find established at this time. For if “Jesus Christ—” most emphatically “the seed of the woman—” was, in the divine determination, “the lamb slain from the foundation of the world^c;” what could more aptly typify his death, than the oblation of an innocent animal? And when we read, that God cloathed our first parents with the skins of these sacrificed animals, what are we to infer? that he meant only to protect their bodies from the inclemency of the weather? It seems far from being the whole of the case. The act is capable of a higher meaning; and may also refer to the security of their souls. For in how significant, though emblematical, a manner, was it adapted to represent to them—that this of

^b Heb. ix. 22.

^c Rev. xiii. 8.

sacrifice was the only method, by which their “transgression would be forgiven, and their sin be covered^d.”

If you admit this interpretation, it plainly shews, that sacrifice, *animal* sacrifice, was a kind of *sacrament*; which, at the same time that it set forth the demerit of sin, carried in it a pledge of pardon and forgiveness, through faith in the promised Redeemer: and without which faith it was of no avail; as may easily be deduced from the account we have of the sacrifices of Cain and Abel.

But *Faith* was not the only condition of acceptance: *Obedience* was also required at their hands. For here it is evident, that as our first parents were received into a new covenant, so were they placed again in a new state of trial; and endowed with strength for farther services. What these services were to be, we may readily infer from the declaration of God in the text: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman; and between thy seed and her seed^e.” Now en-

^d Psal. xxxii. 1. See Hammond in loc.

^e Gen. iii. 15.

mity implies an opposition of will, inclination, and interest. And therefore, enmity to the *evil* being must infer a love and fidelity to the *good* one^s. The words then are fairly capable of this meaning—that, as the grand apostate would continually endeavour to seduce them and their posterity to sin; so it was their duty continually to endeavour, on the other hand, to repel his temptations, and keep themselves stedfast in virtue; as the only way of becoming at last fit objects of farther mercy. An enmity and victory were both predicted: and, as they knew, to their woe, that the *tempter's* first conquest over *them*, consisted in his making them sinful, and exposing them to God's displeasure; so it must needs appear, that their reciprocal conquest over *him*, must be again of a similar nature: that it must consist in becoming righteous and good: in maintaining such an uniform practice of religion and virtue, as might finally restore them to the divine favour, and their ori-

^s Rev. exam. Ibid. p. 62.

ginal tranquillity of mind. And what else could they conclude from their reprieve? from the time that was allowed them after their sentence? but only, that it was to be a time of probation and discipline; in which, though they might suffer many things for a punishment of their sin; they might yet exhibit daily proofs of their fidelity in the war against “the seed of the serpent;” and of their earnest concern to be reconciled to God by a steady observance of his will and commands.

But to support them under the difficulties of this warfare, and to keep them steady in this virtuous service, they had great need of some *Encouragements*. This life afforded them but a melancholy prospect: For here they were irrecoverably doomed to labour, sorrow, pain, and death. They must therefore look to another state; of which the very delay of their sentence gave them no mean, no slight intimation. For surely they could never imagine, that

they were sparedd merely to undergo these troubles; to contend with diseases; to fight a tedious war with their enemy; to raise up children to succeed them in the same train of sorrows; and then sink into dust and oblivion. No. Their fairer hopes, methinks, might be, especially when they knew, that the war was at last to terminate in a victory; that they should reap some fruits, some advantages from it: And since these fruits and advantages were not to be obtained here, that they were reserved in store to reward their patience and fidelity hereafter^s.

And in these hopes they might be farther confirmed by the words of the sentence pronounced upon them. For the sentence adjudged that part of them only to *death*, *i. e.* to *dust* or dissolution, which had been formed out of the dust. But that part was the *body*: and therefore the *soul*, as an immaterial, living principle, was not affected by it; but might still remain, and

^s WINDER'S H. of K. vol. I. ch. ii. § 2.

continue to exist in a separate state, after the sentence had taken place^h. In this separate state then, our first parents might rationally expect, if they persevered in the ways of righteousness, to enjoy at length some comfortable blessings; some of those valuable blessings they had lost: to enjoy some part of their paradisaical happiness; of that calm, serene, and spiritual happiness, which they had formerly experienced, when they stood partakers of the divine favour, and were approved by their own consciences.

This expectation, then, of such great reward in a future state, was encouragement sufficient to keep them steady in the uniform practice of virtue and religion. And upon the strength of this encouragement,

^h What Adam's notion of a future state might really be, we know not: but to that part of the sentence passed upon him—"Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return--" the Targums subjoin these remarkable words: *Attamen ex pulvere, suscitandus es, ut reddas judicium et rationem omnium quæ feceris, in die judicii magni.* Vide in Gen. iii. 19.

some of their posterity afterwards advanced to an eminent degree of piety and holiness. They opposed the immoralities of the antediluvian times; bore the scoffs and contradiction of sinners; withstood the temptations and allurements of the world; and finished a painful, exemplary course, in hopes of a blessed immortality. For they that could act in such manner, and give up the comforts of the present life, plainly declare, that they sought a better and nobler inheritance—"even an inheritance eternal in the heavens."

Allow this reasoning to be just; and it evidently appears, that the true religion—which is the point I would inculcate—has been always the *same* from the *fall* of Adam; subsisting ever on the *same* principles of *faith*, and leading men on to a virtuous *obedience*, in hopes of attaining *eternal happiness*.

And hence again we may, finally, perceive, how nearly an infidel came once to the *truth*, in the title of a book, which he
profes-

professedly wrote against it. For it is obvious, I presume, from what has been said, that "Christianity is" almost "as old as the creation."

Now to God, &c. *Amen.*

S E R M O N V.

JUDE, ver. 14, 15.

And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying; "Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgement upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them, of all their ungodly deeds, which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

WE have seen our first parents, after their fall, admitted into a new covenant; established on a special promise, and confirmed by significant rites. These rites, performed at stated times in the place appropriated to the purpose; that is, on every

sabbath before the *shechinah*ⁱ; were excellently adapted to preserve in their minds a due sense of the mercies of that covenant; and to render them attentive to the terms and conditions, on which they were to enjoy the benefits of it. Nor is there any room to doubt, but that our first parents were careful to comply with these terms; and to testify their gratitude for what God had done, by their steady performance of what he required^k.

It was not long, however, before they observed the pernicious effects of their great offence, in the contrary behaviour of some of their children. “Sin now began to reign in their mortal bodies; and they obeyed it in the lusts thereof^l.” For Cain and his descendants, following the propensities of their corrupt inclinations, fell away, regardless of their duty, into all the abominations of vice and immorality: “every generation,

ⁱ WINDER’S H. of Knowledge, vol. I. ch. ii. § 1. TAYLOR’S 6ch. of Scr. Div, ch. xiv, &c.

^k Vide R. ELIEZER *Pirke*, c. xx.

^l Rom. vi, 12.

one after another, not only imitating, but even surpassing, the wickedness of the former ^m."

In process of time, the posterity of Seth, making alliances with the descendants of Cain, became infected with the same contagion; and at length degenerated so far, that all sense of the true religion was entirely lost and extinguished among them.

Thus both the branches of Adam's family, the whole antediluvian race (a few only excepted) fell away from their allegiance to God; from the worship and service they were bound to pay him; and sunk, as will hereafter appear, into gross idolatry, superstition, and magic; and into a general licentiousness, and depravation of manners. For at this period, we are told, that "the wickedness of man was great in the earth; and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually ⁿ."

[^m JOSEPH. Antiq. Jud. lib. I. c. ii. § 2. EUTYCH. Annal. p. 25.

ⁿ Gen. vi. 25.

Having

Having taken this general view of the strange corruption of the antediluvian race; let us now look back, survey in a more particular manner the foul source from whence it sprung, and then trace it through the several gradations by which it rose and increased in the world. For, these things being known, we shall be better able to discover the propriety, reasonableness, and expediency of those extraordinary methods, which Providence made use of, time after time, to check its growth and retard its progress.

It is abundantly evident from the Scripture-account, that Cain was early infected with “an evil heart of unbelief^o :” and therefore it is no wonder, that he should soon “depart from the living God.” The first act of worship he performed, was performed in hypocrisy: which must render it of course detestable to him, “who pondereth the heart, and requireth truth in the inward parts^p.” And accordingly we read, that “the Lord had

^o Heb. iii. 12.

^p Ps. xli. 6.

“respect unto Abel, and to his offering;”
 because it was brought in faith and sincerity:
 “but unto Cain, and to his offering, he
 had not respect.”

This preference, which should have taught him the indispensable necessity of inward holiness; and should have put him upon correcting and reforming his heart: this preference, I say, instead of producing these salutary effects, incited in his breast still viler passions, which urged him on to the blackest deed. “He was thereupon, says the text, very wroth; and his countenance fell:” that is, he was strongly agitated with grief and anger; vehemently transported with indignation and revenge.

In this state of mind God kindly accosts him; exhorts him to calm and moderate his resentment, and to refrain from the indulgence of such criminal passions. “Why is thy countenance fallen? And why art thou so wroth” with thy brother, when the fault

^a Gen. iv. 4, 5.

^b Ibid. ver. 5.

^c Ibid, ver. 6.

is entirely thine own? “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin,” that is, the punishment of thy sin, “lieth at the door[†] ;” follows the act, and will instantly overtake thee. And here beware: for the appetite or desire of a certain sin now rageth in thy breast: “but” (as it is excellently expressed in an old English version) “let it be subdued unto thee; and see thou rule it[‡].” This is the reading of MATTHEWS’s Bible^{*}; and CRANMER’s is to the same sense, though not quite so clear. But that defect is amply supplied, in the edition of 1585, by the following marginal note—“Sin doth provoke and stir thee to kill thy brother; take heed, and give no place to it; but resist it, and be lord over it.”

Adopt this translation, which is sufficiently exact, and supported by the *Targums* and

[†] Gen. iv. ver. 7.

[‡] Ibid. ver. 7.

^{*} Printed in the year 1537.

ancient Versions^{*}; and it manifestly appears, how extremely sollicitous the Lord was, that Cain should suppress the lust of revenge, and keep it from breaking out into sin. Nor is it less apparent how corrupt and depraved his heart must be, who, notwithstanding this kind admonition and remonstrance, could yet persist in his wicked design, and imbrue his hands in his brother's blood. This innocent blood called for vengeance; and it speedily overtook the murderer. For God pronounced him accursed; banished him from the place where he then resided; and expelled him from his own presence^y: that is, in modern language, *excommunicated*, or, *cut him off* from the privilege of public worship.

^y The words which we now translate—"Unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him—" are thus paraphrased in the *Jerusalem Targum*. Verum in manum tuam tradidi potestatem concupiscentiæ malæ, tu autem dominabere ei. That of *Onkelos*, and of *B. Uziel* is to the same purpose. Arabic versions Ad te spectat moderatio ejus, &c. The propriety of this interpretation, respecting the circumstances of the case, is well supported by Dr. Jeffery in his *Select Discourses*, II. p. 53, &c. And the objections made to it from the anomaly of the language, taken in this sense, are answered by Ainsworth, &c. on the place.

^{*} Gen. iv. 11—14.

A pu-

A punishment sufficiently fore; and, as himself complains, hard to be borne. For it was, in short, to cast him off as a reprobate; to leave him, destitute of grace, to the perverse counsels of his own heart, to fill up the measure of his iniquities; and, in the event, to consign him over to utter destruction^a.

This Cain plainly understood; and therefore was afraid, that “every one that should find him, would immediately kill him^b.” But God preserved him, as a monument of the vengeance that awaits sin; and kept him in life, as a standing monition to the rest of the sons of Adam; who might read in *his* fate a very useful lesson to *themselves*. For hereby they must needs be convinced, that God took cognizance of human actions: that no sin, however secret, could escape his notice: that every offence would be brought to account, and meet with its condign punishment: and consequently, that there was no other way of avoiding misery, and securing

^a See GROTIUS, LE CLERC, and PATRICK in loc.

^b Gen. iv. 14.

happiness, than by a sincere attachment to piety and goodness.—But we must quit these reflections, and follow Cain into the land of banishment.

Now, tinged, as he was, with bad principles; and excluded from the established means of improvement; it is natural to infer, that, in this land, he became still more depraved in his morals; and sunk deeper into vice and sensuality*. And if we consider likewise the effects of sensuality, how apt it is to debase the mind, and to extinguish the evidence of things not seen; it is but too probable, that his religious sentiments, if he had any left, soon languished and fell into decay; or at least degenerated into idle superstitions.

If you suppose this to be the case; and it is by no means an unreasonable supposition; then it clearly follows, that his several descendants, committed to the guidance of corrupt nature, without instruction, and without restraint, must needs deviate more

* See Jude, ver. 11. and the Com. thereon. Joseph. Ant. Jud. lib. I. c. ii. § 2. HEIDEGGER, Hist. Patriar. Exerc. V. § 45.

and more from the paths of truth and virtue; and, being at length enslaved to their unruly passions, must be carried on, as those passions moved them, into every kind and degree of iniquity.

And now, as a *proof* of this charge, let it here be remarked, that, in the whole history of the line of Cain, we meet with no instance, no trace, no intimation, of any one virtuous, or truly religious action; but a great deal of the contrary. Instruments of violence are found in their hands; and the harp and the pipe are heard in their feasts^d: which plainly imply, that they gave themselves up to sensual enjoyments—which plainly imply, that they were luxurious, lustful, and debauched at home; and abroad, unjust, rapacious and cruel.

In the midst of this corruption, however, they still entertained, we may well presume, some faint notion of a Deity. For this notion is so connatural to the mind of man, that no people upon earth were so far lost to the sense of things, as to be utterly devoid

^d Gen. iv. 21, 22. JOSEPH. Ant. Jud. Lib. I. c. ii. § 2.

of it. But then, as the Cainites could have little or no knowledge of the supreme, invisible Being, with whom they never had any intercourse; so it is extremely probable, that they addressed their devotions, such as they were, to those visible objects, with whose appearance they were most affected, and by whose influence they were most benefited. This, we are sure, was the case of the world in after-times; which is no small presumption, that it was the case in the present. Some indeed have endeavoured to establish this opinion on the authority of Scripture^e: but, whether the Scripture countenance it or not, certain it is, the earliest records of heathen antiquity speak fully to the point. For Sanchoniatho expressly affirms, that “in a time of great drought Cain and his wife lifted up their hands, and prayed to the Sun; whom they looked upon

^e Vide Targum ONKELOS et JONATH. BEN UZIEL, in Gen. iv. 26. MAIMON. de Idol. in Cap. i. et Notis. SELDEN de Diis Syr. Prolegom. Cap. iii. MARSHAM, Can. Chron. Sec. iv.

as the sole god and sovereign of heaven^f :” and *they* might be also particularly induced to deify and adore this splendid luminary from another motive ; namely, as it carried the nearest resemblance to that glorious *Shechinah*, before which they had formerly been used to celebrate the rites of divine worship^g.

Soon after this, as the same history informs us, the like worship was extended by their posterity to the several parts of nature : to the heavens, moon, and stars ; to fire, air, and wind ; to the earth, trees, and water ; to beasts, birds, and reptiles^h. All these indeed

^f Ἐκ τούτων τῆς γινομένης κληθῆναι ΓΕΝΟΣ καὶ ΓΕΝΕΑΝ—αὐχμῶν δὲ γινυμένων, τὰς χειρας ὀρέσειν εἰς ἄραντες πρὸς τὸν ἩΑΙΟΝ· τῶτον γάρ, φησι, θεὸν ἐνόμιζον μόνον ἔραν κύριον, ΒΕΕΛΣ’ΑΜΗΝ καλεῖσθαι. Apud Euseb. Præp. Evangel. lib. I. cap. x. p. 34. That Γένος and Γενεά are Cain and his wife, Bishop Cumberland has proved at large, in his Remarks on Sanchoniatho, p. 219, &c.

^g PATRICK’S Com. Gen. iv. 16.

^h Ἔχεις δὲ καὶ ἐν τῇ φοινικικῇ θεολογίᾳ, ὡς ἄρα Φοινίκων οἱ πρῶτοι, φυσικοὶ, ἥλιον καὶ σελήνην καὶ τὰς λοιπὰς πλανήτας ἀστέρας, καὶ τὰ στοιχεῖα θεὸς μόνον ἐγίνωσκον, κ. τ. λ. Jam in Phœnicum etiam Theologia reperias, qui principes apud illos naturalis sese philosophiæ studio dediderunt, eos solem pariter atque lunam, cæterasque stellas inerrantes, elementa præterea, quæque cum iis conjuncta sunt, deorum

deed are not distinctly specified as so many objects of their adoration: *most* of them, however, are; and *all*, I think, implied. For, when we are assured, that “they deified and adored the plants of the earth;” we can hardly doubt of their advancing the other, and far nobler, parts of the creation to the like honourⁱ.

In consequence of this worship, the arts of magic, sorcery, and divination, were studied and practised; and superstitious, obscene rites were instituted and solemnized among them^k. These detestable rites of their religion naturally inflamed their passions; and hurried them still farther into all the excesses of outrage and violence, of licentiousness and debauchery^l, in civil life.

deorum in loco habuisse. Iisdem porro mortales vetustissimos terræ germina dedicasse, quibus divinitatem ipsi quoque cum adorationis cultu tribuebant.—EUSEB. Præp. Evang. lib I, cap. ix. p. 28. cap. x. p. 34.

ⁱ Vide HEIDEG. Hist. Patr. Exercit. viii. De Theolog. Cainitarum, et Idololatria Antediluviana.

^k PHIL. BYBL. apud EUSEB. Præp. Ev. vol. I. c. x. p. 35. ATHANAS. de Incar. Verbi Dei. tom. I. p. 64.

^l Gen. vi. 11—13.

Now, whilst the descendants of Cain lived in this impious and profligate manner; the line of Seth went regularly on, under the good conduct and tuition of Adam, in the due observance of the duties of religion, and the uniform practice of a holy life. In the third generation, in the days of Enos, we meet with a signal instance of their zeal for the honour and glory of God, and for the preservation and improvement of his worship and service. For “then they began to call themselves by the name of the Lord^m ;” that is, the servants and worshipers of the true God; in contradistinction to the Cainites, who had no regard or veneration for him. This name, which they now assumed, plainly intimates, that they devoted themselves to a stricter life of holiness and virtue, than they had led before; and that, for fear of being “seduced by the error of the wicked,” they prudently kept themselves, as God intended they should, from all commerce or communication with the apostate line. In this state of separation, diligent and atten-

^m Gen. iv. 26.

rive to their vows and obligations, they made, it should seem, great advances in virtue and goodness ; and, for their extraordinary piety, were entitled the people or “ sons of God ^a.”

How long they continued to improve themselves, or even to preserve the virtuous attainments they had already made, is a matter of some uncertainty. Sure, however, we are, that, in the succession of few generations, they declined, and “ fell from their own steadfastness ;” yielded to the suggestions of their sensual appetites ; and became soon renowned for their enormous crimes ^o.

This defection, great as it was, the Scripture accounts for in a very natural and easy manner. When both families “ began to multiply,” and to extend themselves ; they approached, of course, nearer to each other. Their vicinity soon drew them into mutual conversation ; and that conversation into closer alliance. For when the “ sons of God,” the posterity of Seth, “ saw the daugh-

^a Gen. vi. 2.

^o JOSEPH. Antiq. Jud. lib. I. c. iii. § 1.

ters of the men" of the other line; they were so smitten with their beauty, that, contrary to the charge of their pious ancestors, and probably to the command of God, "they took them wives of all which they chose^p;" that is, such, and perhaps so many, as they liked to possess. The consequence of this interdicted affinity was plainly then, as it has always proved in similar cases since, ruinous to all piety. The line of Seth was hereby corrupted. For "the daughters of men turned away these sons of God from following him;" led them to serve other gods; to associate in all the abominations of idolatry, and all the impurities of a sensual life.

This opinion is not only founded on the natural and experienced course of things; but seems to be confirmed by the very words of Scripture. For these, if I am not mistaken, were the *Nephilim*, the *apostates*, mentioned Gen. vi. 4. "who kept not their first estate," but *fell off* from the service of God, and became *giants* in wickedness, and *rebels*

^p Gen. vi. 2..

against heaven ⁹. Their children, of the next generation, endowed with their strength, and encouraged by their example, broke out into the same enormities; and filled the world with impiety, idolatry, rapine, and violence. “These mighty men,” says the text, “were of old men of renown^r.” A form of expression, which clearly intimates, that their exploits and characters were conveyed down through ages by tradition; and might, at length, be inserted in some ancient book, called “the book of Enoch,” to which the Apostle refers.

In what period of the antediluvian age this apostacy happened, the Scripture does not expressly determine. Data, however, it affords, by which we may settle it with some precision. At the twenty-second verse of the ivth chapter of Genesis we read—“And the sister of Tubal Cain was Naamah:” A piece of information, which may appear, at first sight, of little or no importance. But

⁹ נפילים defectores, apostatae, gigantes, rebelles, a נפל cœcidit, defecit, irruit, &c.

^r Gen. vi. 4.

if we translate her *name* into our own language, it will instantly throw an amazing light on the present subject ; as it will aptly connect *this* verse of the ivth with the *first* of the vith chapter, where the cause of the defection is particularly described. For Naamah* signifies *fair* or *beautiful* : and when we are told, that the posterity of Seth married the daughters of the other family, because they were *fair* ; may we not reasonably conclude from this connected view of the passages, that the sacred historian meant to inform us, that Naamah was the first, the noblest, and the most celebrated of all those beauties, with whom the alliance was made ?

If you allow this conclusion to be just, then the opinion of the Arabian writers, who suppose the defection to have happened in the days of Jared†, will appear to stand on good ground, and to be well supported by the authority of Scripture.

* נַחֲמָה *amœna, jucunda, pulchra.*

† Vide ALMACIN. et PATRICID. apud HOTTINGER. Smeg. Orient. c. viii. p. 235. in voce *Jared*. HEIDEG. Hist. Patr. Exer. xi. p. 310.

But

But this is not the only thing, which the foregoing remark brings to our knowledge. It shews us likewise the reason, why Moses, in the genealogy of the line of Cain, stopped at Lamech, the father of Naamah. He could properly proceed no farther : because the distinction was then at an end ; as both the families became intermixed, and intimately blended with each other.

The sad effect of this unlawful mixture we have already seen, in that violent inundation of vice and impiety, which issued from it, and which soon overflowed the world.

To account for this impiety in a more determinate manner, it may be of use to observe, that Adam was still alive : and “ because the sentence,” pronounced “ against” him for his “ evil work,” was not yet “ executed” upon him ; “ therefore,” it should seem, “ the hearts of these sons of men were fully set in them,” both to think, and “ to do evil.” The sentence deferred they might impiously deride, as a vain and empty

^u Eccl. viii. 11.

threat. And of the *predicted seed* they might scoffingly say, “where is the promise of his coming^x?” These “hard speeches,” which the prophecy of Enoch implies they made, evidently amount to what St. Jude calls, ver. 4. “denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ:” evidently amount, not only to a denial of the revealed plan of redemption; but to a total disbelief of an over-ruling providence, and a future state—which Cain, it is said, disbelieved before them^y. When they had once brought themselves to think, that either there was no God; or that he was so regardless of human affairs, as neither to reward the good, nor punish the wicked; it is no wonder, “they should thenceforth walk,” without remorse, after their own ungodly lusts; and give themselves over unto lasciviousness,

^x 2 Pet. iii. 4.

^y The *Jerusalem Targum*, and that of JONATHAN BEN UZIEL, introduce Cain conversing with his brother Abel in these words—
 לִית דִּין וְלִית דִּין וְגוֹ non est judicium, nec est judex; non est seculum futurum, nec dabitur præmium bonum iustis, nec ultio sumetur de improbis, &c. Vide in Gen. iv. 8.

viouſneſs, to work all uncleanness with greedineſs^z.” For the reſtraints of religion being now removed, there was nothing left to check or controul the perverſeneſs of their nature.

If you admit this to be a true representation of their moral ſtate; and thus the Scripture ſeems to repreſent it; then ſomething, ’tis plain, was neceſſary to be done, as well to correct the erroneouſneſs of their principles, as to reform the depravity of their manners. At this time therefore, and with this view, a *ſecond* revelation came ſeaſonably in, exactly correſpondent to their neceſſities and condition. For Enoch was commiſſioned to preach the doctrine of a future ſtate, and to declare the certainty of a future judgment.

In purſuance of this commiſſion, he opened the proſpect of another life, and laid it before them in its different circumſtances: he ſhewed them what glorious rewards awaited the righteous, and what

^z Jude ver. 18. Eph. iv. 19.

dreadful punishments were reserved for the wicked; “what tribulation and anguish” should hereafter fall “upon every soul of man that doeth evil; and what honour, glory, and peace” should be the lot of him “that worketh good^a.” These things he clearly laid before them^b; that, knowing the encouragements and terrours of the Lord, they might be influenced thereby to return to him. And what can be imagined more influential? What could prevail, if this could not? Had it rested only on the bare credit of the preacher, a doctrine of this vast importance would have justly merited their most serious regard. But, that nothing might be wanting either to engage their attention, or to confirm their belief, God was pleased to exert himself in an extraordinary and miraculous manner; and to attest the truth of what his

^a Rom. ii. 9, 10.

^b See Jude 14, 15; where the punishment of the wicked plainly implies that there will be likewise a recompence to the righteous.

prophet had spoken, by a proper, convincing sign. For what more proper, more convincing sign could they possibly have in proof of such a doctrine; than to see the prophet translated alive^c, and carried up, in a conspicuous manner before their eyes, into that very state, the existence and reality of which he had just before revealed to them^d?

Such doctrine, one would think, supported by such evidence, would have borne down all opposition, and subjected the world to the authority of its dictates.

The doctrine itself was admirably calculated to correct those impious notions they maintained; and to make them sensible, that God inspects the conduct of men in this world, and will recompense them hereafter as their works deserve. Its

^c Gen. v. 24. Heb. xi. 5.

^d See Targ B. UZIEL, in Gen. v. 24. And hence Enoch was called Metatron, the person *removed on high*: from מִצְּדָן and מֵיִרָה. This is at least as plausible an account of the name, as any of the various ones already given.

attendant

attendant miracle, the translation of the prophet, was a visible proof of his high regard for his faithful servants; and a sure token of his firm determination to make them happy in a better state^e. To Adam, if he was then alive, as the *Samaritan* account supposes, this remarkable event must have been a lively and affecting instance of what he might have enjoyed, had he kept his innocence; as well as an earnest of the promised victory over *him*, who had robbed him of it^f: And to his *sons*, if he was dead, as the *Hebrew* account declares him, it must have afforded a seasonable and animating consolation under the depressing sense of their own mortality: And to *all* it must have suggested a forcible and cogent argument for repentance; as it carried a clear and comfortable intimation, that if they “walked with God,” and overcame the sinful inclinations of their nature, they should finally be restored to the favour of

^e WORTHINGTON'S Essay on Hum. Redemption. ch. iii. § 6.

^f Bp. LAW'S Theory of Rel. part ii. p. 60.

their

their Maker, and behold his presence in bliss and immortality. And repentance, we might expect, would have accordingly followed. But alas! we have an instance now before us, that nothing is so forcible, interesting, and persuasive, but what the depravity and perverseness of man can withstand and reject. For this abandoned race, deaf to these awakening calls, obstinately continued their vicious course, and at last perished in their wickedness.

But, though “the word then preached did not profit *them*;^s” yet to *us* it remains of excellent service. It shews us, that true religion was always the same; and had always the same end in view. Its whole design has ever been to call men off from the practice of vice to serve the living and true God; to make them virtuous in this life, that they may be happy in the other. This is apparent under every dispensation; and more especially under the dispensation of

^s Heb. iv. 2.

the Gospel: by which “we are made truly complete; being fully supplied with all the things pertaining unto life and godliness^h.”

Having therefore such means of improvement in our hands, let us carefully make use of them. For if God punished the old world for despising the revelations delivered to them; how can we possibly expect to “escape, if we neglect so great salvationⁱ?” Let us ever remember, that the Gospel is an institution peculiarly calculated for the advancement of piety and virtue: and let it effectually engage us, as it plainly teaches us, “to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts; and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our saviour Jesus Christ^k.”

^h 2 Pet. i. 3.

ⁱ Heb. ii. 3.

^k Tit. ii. 12, 13.

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour and glory, might, majesty, adoration and praise, both now and for evermore. *Amen.*

S E R M O N VI.

GEN. VI. 3.

And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man; for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.

IN my last Discourse I laid before you a very ample account of the strange corruption of the antediluvian race: where I endeavoured to shew; from what bitter source it originally sprung; in what different forms it displayed itself; and by what growing advances it gained upon the world; till it be-

came at length so universally prevalent, as to lay the Almighty under the sad necessity of “destroying man from the face of the earth¹.”

It is observed by the author of the book of *Wisdom*, that “idolatry is the beginning, the cause, and the end of all evil^m.” And this observation we have seen verified in the conduct and conversation of Cain and his descendants. For no sooner did they forsake the true God, and engage in the worship of false deities; no sooner did they begin to “esteem either fire, wind, or the swift air, the circle of the stars, the violent water, or the lights of heaven to be the gods that governed the worldⁿ ;” but, in consequence of the service they paid them; in consequence of “the secret ceremonies used, and the revellings of strange rites performed;” they gradually fell into all the abominations of vice and immorality, and into all the ex-

¹ Gen. vi. 7.

^m Ch. xiv. 27.

ⁿ Wisdom. xiii. 2.

cesses of outrage and violence, both in public and private life.

In process of time, these impious principles and detestable practices gained admittance into the other line: where they spread and prevailed with fatal success, and with aggravated degrees of malignity. For, as the best, when corrupted, become the worst; so it is asserted of the posterity of Seth, that “for the degree of zeal which they had formerly shewn for virtue, they now shewed by their actions a double degree of wickedness.”

Such was then the state of the world. When “the Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that would understand, and seek after God;” behold, he found that “they were all gone out of the way,” that “they were altogether become abominable.” “For the wickedness of man was great in the earth; and every imagina-

• JOSEPH. Ant. Jud. lib. I. cap. iii. § 1.

† Psal. xiv. 3, 4.

tion of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually ⁹.”

But this progression of vice the great and righteous Governour of the world cannot be supposed to look upon with an eye of indifference. The perfection of his nature, the concern he maintained for the security of religion, and the advancement of human happiness, lead us to conclude, that he would rather interpose, and kindly throw in the way of these profligates, as many checks, prohibitions and restraints, as were consistent with the freedom of moral agents. Nor is this conclusion destitute of the support and countenance of Scripture. For the words of the text plainly imply, that “God *did* often strive with man;” that he made use of various and powerful methods, as well to deter him from the commission of sin, as to keep him steadfast in the practice of virtue.

It has been already observed, that “the *seed* of the woman was finally to destroy the power and tyranny of sin and Satan, by

⁹ Gen. vi. 5.

his steady attachment to truth and righteousness. Now this consideration must naturally inspire all wise and thinking parents with a deep concern and zealous care, that their children might be instructed in the principles of religion, and trained up in the paths of virtue. And such care they must still be the more anxious to employ, because they perceived, that all their hopes, both for themselves and their posterity, depended upon this rectitude or uprightness of disposition; without which it was impossible that any of them could be the *promised seed*, who was to restore again the human race to its original purity and perfection^r.

Here then was laid an excellent foundation for the instruction and improvement of the rising generations. And the superstructure erected upon it was equally good. For, as they advanced in life, those documents of virtue, which they had received in their youth, were still renewed from time to time; being constantly inculcated and enforced on their minds by the enjoined observance of

^r Rev. exam. vol. I. dissert. ix. p. 155.

the established rites of worship. For every sabbath, which they celebrated in its weekly return—every sacrifice which they offered—and every public act of religion they performed, served to convince them of the malignant and destructive nature of sin, as well as to impress them with a due sense of the necessity of holiness.

By these means, which were all *standing* means of instruction, the inhabitants of the old world, had they not been greatly wanting to themselves, might have made a truly laudable proficiency in the knowledge and practice of religion. Negligent, however, as they were; when they became degenerate, and had foolishly deviated from the path of duty, the *occasional* transactions of the times, the *incidental* displays of divine government, supplied them with powerful and awakening motives to recal them to repentance and a better life.

Their great Father continued among them, above *nine hundred* years, a living monument both of the justice and mercy of God: a living monument of his extreme hatred and abhor-

abhorrence of sin; as well as of his tender love, and compassionate regard for the sinner:—and therefore, a monument, one would conceive, that must daily suggest such arguments to their thoughts, as could hardly fail either to awe, or to allure them, into stricter obedience.

And the same moral instructions were also conveyed by *other* occurrences. For, as the punishment of Cain exhibited to the world a woful proof of the dire effects of vice and impenitence; so was the exaltation of Enoch into heaven, one of the noblest incitements, that can well be imagined, to the conscientious practice of piety and goodness.

Add to these, as operating to the like purposes, the frequent exhortations and admonitions of their prophets; and more especially that tremendous punishment denounced against them by the prophet Enoch: who, foreseeing it would be executed by a *deluge*, imposed on his son the name of Methuselah, by way of sign and confirmation of it. For the word, Methuselah, imports, that, when the person so called is *dead*, there shall ensue an *inundation*

*tion of waters**. And so exactly did the event correspond with his name, that in the very year he died, the earth was overwhelmed by the deluge.

Now, after the delivery of this alarming prophecy, transmitted to us by St. Jude; such was the patience and long-suffering of God, that they had no less than *eight hundred* years allowed them, to reflect on their condition; to repent of their wickedness; and to amend their ways. And in the course of this time they were moreover solicited, encouraged, and admonished to the due performance of these necessary duties, by the repeated instructions and good examples of those holy men, who were sent among them as “preachers of righteousness”.

* Ita Enoch propheta summus, cum prophetico spiritu prævidisset cladem illam (diluvium) filii mortem statim subsequituram, vocavit illum מֶתוּשֶׁלַח Methuselah. Quo nomine significabat statim illo mortuo futuram emissiorem sive aquarum inundationem in perniciem mundi totius. BOCHART. Phaleg. lib. II. c. xiii. p. 100.

† Of whom, it should seem, there were no less than eight. For St. Peter calls Noah ὁ γὰρ διὰ δικαιοσύνης κέρυμα. 2 Pet. ii. 5,

But, notwithstanding these methods of mercy and monition, which God in his goodness employed for their amendment; yet, when he came again, at the end of this period, to take cognizance of what they had done, he found them immersed still deeper in vice and sensuality; “being then really nothing but flesh”; that is, entirely devoted to sensual gratifications, and constantly pursuing “the works of the flesh.”

Now, the works of the flesh have in all ages been ever the same. And were therefore in the *antediluvian*, as in the *apostolical* times, most probably these: “Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like”^x—vices that called, especially when grown to such enormous height, for a signal and speedy vengeance.

Accordingly the Lord (having before administered proper consolation to his few,

^x Gen. vi. 3.

^y Gal. v. 19—21.

faithful servants) ^y now positively assured this impious generation, that his spirit would
neither

^y That they should receive such consolations was manifestly necessary for their encouragement in well-doing: and that they did receive them is plainly implied in that prophecy of Lamech, which he delivered at his son's birth, "This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil (labour) of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed." Gen. v. 29. The sense of which, variously interpreted, passage seems to me to be, in short, as follows—"This same Noah shall bring us full and ample comfort for all the pains and difficulties we have undergone in supporting the cause of truth and virtue. Through him it will appear, that our labour is not in vain in the Lord. For when God comes to punish the ungodly, and to destroy the world by a deluge, (see note ^y p. 138) he will give us, in the person of this man, a signal instance of his tender regard for the good and righteous. For he will conduct him safely through that perilous scene, and land him securely on a new world, which we may look upon as an earnest of that future inheritance, which is reserved for us, who have walked in the same paths of righteousness." Comp. Heb. xi. 7.—To make out this meaning, I conceive that the words—"Our work, and labour of our hands—" should be taken here, as they are often elsewhere, in a *moral*, and not in a *natural*, sense—and that the "curse" here mentioned has no reference to that denounced at the *fall*, but means the destruction to which the earth was devoted, and which was accomplished by the deluge; as will appear to any one, who compares Gen. ch. v. 29, with ch. viii. 21.

LUD. CAPPELLUS, in his Comment on the place, considers it nearly in the same light. Sensus ergo simplicissimus est: Gaudebit

terra,

neither strive, nor his patience bear any longer with them, than for the space of an *hundred and twenty* years: and that he was then determined, if his vengeance was not averted by their amendment, to destroy them by an utter excision from the earth.

But this denunciation, like the former, instead of producing its desired effect, and bringing them back to penitence and piety, served only, by the perverseness of their incorrigible dispositions, to harden them the more in their wickedness: insomuch, that when God, towards the close of this momentous period, inspected their conduct the third time; he saw they had filled up the measure of their iniquities; and were completely fitted for that approaching destruction, to which they had been justly devoted. Such, I say, was their state, when God beheld them the *third* time. For it is a point worthy of observation, that in the account

terra, exultabunt pii homines, quum Dei justitiam in impios homines vindictam sub hoc meo filio futuram, novamque mundi faciem per eum exorituram, in nova hominum sobole ex eo emanatura, conspecturi sunt.

here

here given of the growing degeneracy of mankind, there are *three* gradations distinctly specified; each of them in succession surpassing the other, and appearing in blacker colours. At the *third* verse of this chapter²; they are described as “*carnal*—” fulfilling the lusts of the flesh. At verse the *fifth*, they are represented as *fixed* and *rooted* in their vices—“their wickedness was GREAT; and every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil CONTINUALLY.” This is strong painting: and yet, at the *eleventh* verse, it is still greatly heightened. For there, the *ground* is said to be *tainted* with their sins; and to *groan* under the weight of their iniquities—“The earth was *corrupt* before God, and the earth was *filled* with violence³.” Now, by CORRUPTION the most approved of the Jewish writers generally understand *idolatry*, and the transgression of what we call the *first* table of the law: and by VIOLENCE is plainly meant every kind of *inhumanity* and *injustice*, or the total breach of

² Gen. vi.

³ Vide MUNSTER, et VETABL: &c. In loc.

the *second* table: and therefore, from both expressions taken together, we may justly conclude, that the human race was, at this time, so far lost to all sense of religion and morality, as to be entirely regardless of every duty, which they owed either to God or man^b.

Noah indeed preserved his integrity; and stood, amidst the general corruption, a singular example of true piety and virtue. This distinguished behaviour entitled him there-

^b If the foregoing account of the moral state of the antediluvian world be admitted as tolerably just, then the *Præcepta Noachidarum*, or the precepts delivered to the sons of *Noah*, will appear to stand on good ground; as being well adapted to the condition of the times, and seemingly founded on the reason of things. For if mankind, forgetful of God, were then prone and given to *idolatry*; how necessary was it, that they should be strongly prohibited that practice by a positive law, Ist. De cultu extraneo; and brought back to a due sense of the divine *majesty* by a IId. De maledictione nominis sanctissimi, vel numinis? If they were *violent*, *cruel*, and *revengeful*, how proper was it to restrain their passions by a IIId. law, De effusione sanguinis? If *lustful* and *debauched*, by a IVth. De non revelanda turpitudine? If *rapacious* and *fraudulent*, by a Vth. De furto ac rapina? And, if regardless of *justice* and *equity*, by a VIth. De judiciis, seu regimine forensi ac obedientia civili? &c. These laws, thus applied, derive weight from the state of the world; and at the same time throw light upon it.

fore

fore to distinguished favour: which he accordingly experienced in the wonderful preservation of himself and family. “For the Lord knoweth” as well “how to deliver the godly from distress and danger, as to reserve the unrighteous to the day of judgment, to be punished^c” with a severity proportioned to their guilt and wickedness. And this day was now hastening towards all them that dwelt on the earth. For, since they had all, by their degeneracy, utterly defeated the designs of Providence; and could by no means be brought to answer the proper ends of their creation: nay, since they lived indeed to such purposes, as were directly contrary to those ends, and wholly destructive of them—lived only to rebellion and disobedience to their maker; and to their own mutual misery and destruction^d: since this, I say, was the case with them; it was certainly high time, that God, in mercy as well as justice, should put a speedy period to their existence—as being the only way to

^c 2 Pet. ii. 9.

^d Revelation Exam. vol. I. diff. ix. p. 163.

clear the world of that corruption, which, through the course of so many centuries, he had laboured in vain to correct and remedy. Accordingly therefore, when “the long-suffering,” with which he waited in the days of Noah; and “the preparation of the ark^c,” the last effort of his mercy, could have no effect upon them; he then suffered his indignation to arise; gave a loose to his vengeance; and delivered them all, at once, to death—“bringing in the FLOOD upon the world of the ungodly ^f.”

Should it now be asked, “Why did God make use of this, rather than any other method?” The answer, I think, is easy: Because it was the properest, and the most conducive to the purposes of his providence; the most adequate to his grand design. Idolatry, it is evident, could not be extirpated; piety and virtue could not be restored; till that *incorrigible* race was utterly destroyed, and a better introduced in its stead.

^c 1 Pet. iii. 20.

^f 2 Pet. ii. 5.

“ But the destruction of those impenitents might have been accomplished, you will say, by various *other* means, as well as by a *deluge*.” Doubtless it might. But what if *their* destruction was not the whole intent? What if God had farther ends in view, respecting those who survived? How will matters stand then? It is no unreasonable supposition, this. For, as the sons of Noah had conversed a long time with that corrupt and sinful generation; and were perhaps, some of them, closely connected with the apostate line; it is more than probable, that they were in some degree infected with the idolatrous principles, and vicious practices of the age. What those *practices* were, we have already seen^s; and stand in need of no farther information about them. But with regard to the *principles* of the times, as they are the grand key to this dispensation, it may be of use to consider them here again.

There is a certain prediction concerning the inhabitants of the old world, attributed to Enoch, and preserved by Tertullian, which

sets forth their religious tenets in a clear light. Now, from this prediction it appears, that they were so deeply immersed in superstition and error, as to deify all nature:—
 “ that all the elements, the whole furniture
 “ of the universe, things in heaven, things
 “ on earth, and things under the earth, were
 “ severally perverted by them to the vile purposes of idolatry ; and set up as objects of
 “ divine worship^h ;” In a word, it appears, that they consecrated and adored almost every thing, except Him, who alone is truly adorable : and Him they were in no wise disposed to serve.

Now, if the sons of Noah were in any degree tinctured with these notions ; and inclined to follow such examplesⁱ ; they were
 so

^h Antecesserat Enoch prædicens, omnia elementa, omnem mundi censum, quæ cælo, quæ mari, quæ terra continentur, in idololatriam versuros dæmonas, et spiritus desertorum angelorum, ut pro Deo adversus Dominum consecrarentur, &c. TERTULL, de Idololatria § iv.

ⁱ Cham, filius Noë, superstitionibus illis et sacrilegis artibus infectus fuit. CASSIAN. apud KIRCHER. Obelisc. Pamph. lib. I. c. i.

so far the less likely to preserve and maintain the true religion in its genuine state and purity. And had they continued in that disposition, the design of Providence might have been utterly frustrated; as “the work of the Lord must have failed in their hands.”

The security of religion therefore, and the interest of morality, plainly required, that the present manifestation should carry something in its nature and form, equally adapted to convince them of the erroneousness of these principles, as to deter them from the practice of the forementioned vices. And what, I beseech you, could better answer these several purposes, than the very transaction we are now considering?

If it really was, as it seems to have been, the prevailing opinion of those times, that the *world* was self-existent, independent and eternal; then the Almighty, to assure and convince them that he both made and go-

Lord BARRINGTON in his Exposition of 1 Pet. iii. 17—22, makes it extremely probable, that all Noah's sons, &c. were disobedient and irreligious till they entered into the ark—where they reformed and became penitent. Miscell. Sacra, vol. iii. p. 190. note¹ ed. 1. 70.

verned

verned it, did, as it were, unmake it again: inverting its laws, and abolishing its order.

As we have some reason to believe, that that *water* and *air* were their chief divinities; so we accordingly find, that God made *them* the chief instruments of his wrath and vengeance.

As the *earth* was perhaps esteemed the mother of the gods—of those animal, reptile, and vegetable deities, that subsisted on its surface; so the Lord destroyed the *earth* and its products, together with every animal; such only excepted as were preserved in the ark for the restoration of the species.

And lest the sons of Noah should attribute this terrible execution to the agency and power of some false deity*, God foretels them that himself would do it, and specifies the time and manner of it. “After seven days, behold I—” not any of your imaginary deities—but “I JEHOVAH do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from

* See Is. xlviii. 5.

under heaven. Every thing that is in the earth shall die¹.”

This marvellous event therefore, the avowed work and operation of God, did not only serve to enforce on their minds a strong conviction of his supremacy and power; but carried also a sensible confutation of all those impious and fatal opinions, on which the ancient idolatry was founded. It clearly shewed, that JEHOVAH had no rival: and since to him only belonged glory, dominion, and power; so to him only should be given worship, adoration, and praise.

I have no occasion to observe, for it is extremely visible, with what irresistible force this punishment of the wicked, by the very things wherein they had sinned, must operate on the minds of Noah's family, who were eye-witnesses of it: how it must awaken their attention; fill them with the most awful ideas of God's holiness and purity; convince them of his unchangeable aversion to sin, and abhorrence of its abettors; and consequently deter them from the like provocations. For

¹ Gen. vi. 17.—vii. 4, 10.

whatever

whatever presumption the long-suffering of God might have nourished before in the breasts of daring and hardened sinners; yet now, the vain hopes of escaping his vengeance, otherwise than by repentance and a good life, must all necessarily vanish—must all die, absorbed and buried in the common wreck of the shattered world.

If we limit the design of Providence in this tremendous event, to the bare destruction of those who perished; I can see no good reason, I own, why the Deity should use such a complicated method, and summon all the elements, to put it in execution; “since, without these, they might have fallen down with one blast, being persecuted of vengeance, and scattered abroad with the breath of his power^m.” much less can I account, why the earth was demolished, and every living creature destroyed. But, if we view this transaction in the light it is here placed; and consider it as moreover intended to *correct* the *errors* of them that were preserved; then every circumstance will carry

^m Wisd. xi. 20.

with it its use and beauty ; and the whole will appear to have been ordered and conducted according to the rules of consummate wisdom.

Having thus seen the intent and propriety of this dispensation, with regard to the state and condition of the world, at the time when Providence brought it to pass ; it now only remains, that we draw from it the proper inference, respecting ourselves and our own times. For such is the nature of those dispensations, which are recorded in Scripture ; and so widely are they extended by that unity of design, which runs through them ; that the events which happened in the earliest ages “ are profitable for correction and instruction in righteousnessⁿ, ” even to the latest generations. The things that happened to the *antediluvians*, carried their influence down through the FLOOD, and are meant to operate to the CONFLAGRATION. “ They happened to *them* for ensamples ; and are written for *our* admonition^o : ” “ to the

ⁿ 2 Tim. iii. 16.

^o 1 Cor. x. 11.

intent,

intent, that we should not lust after evil things, as they formerly lusted^p:—"to the intent, that we might learn wisdom at their expence; nor presume to follow them in the ways of disobedience; "considering the end," the disastrous end, "of their conversation^q."

Irreligion and idolatry, profaneness and immorality are in their own nature, and according to the established order of things, injurious and detrimental to man: and this consideration ought in reason to put us upon our guard against them. But if neither the dictates of reason, the admonitions of revelation, nor the inconveniences we feel in a wrong course, can prevail upon us to correct our misdoings; then God himself, as governor of the world, is obliged to take us into his own hands; and to urge us with severer and more extraordinary inflictions. How "fearful a thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God^r," the instance before us is

^p 1 Cor. x. 6.

^q Heb. xiii. 7.

^r Heb. x. 31.

an alarming proof! But if “they, who despised” the *antediluvian* prophets, and the less perfect “law” that was then given, “died without mercy;” “of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God—and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing—and hath done despite unto the spirit of grace?”

That our hearts therefore may be preserved under an awful impression of the divine judgments, let us frequently meditate on those displays of them, which are set before us in the holy Scriptures. And when we reflect, that the “old world,” for the wickedness of its inhabitants, “perished by *water* ;” let us also remember, that “the present world is kept in store, reserved unto *fire* against the day of judgment, and the perdition of ungodly men.”

And since the *one* element will as certainly *dissolve* “the world that now is,” as ever the

* Heb. x. 28, 29.

† 2 Pet. iii. 6, 7.

other deluged “the world that then was;” let us endeavour, like Noah, by keeping the ways of truth and piety, to secure the protection and favour of God; that, when the time comes, we may finally, like him, be safely guarded, ‘conducted and admitted into “that new heaven and new earth—” into that glorious and eternal kingdom, which God hath prepared for them that love him; and “in which dwelleth righteousness,” peace, joy and happiness for ever-more.

Now to God the Father, &c. *Amen.*

S E R M O N VII.

GEN. xi. ver. 4—8.

And they said, Go to, let us build us a city, and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.

And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

So

So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.

W E N Noah was landed on the present earth, and happily saw his piety rewarded with such an amazing instance of divine favour; there is no room to doubt, but that he made religion his chief concern, and zealously propagated it among his posterity. Those religious notions and customs*, which his sons and their descendants carried down along with them into the several countries in which they settled, are incontestable proofs of his care and diligence in this respect.

But, notwithstanding the severity of God in punishing the sins of the *old* world, and the industry of Noah in providing for the instruction of the *new*; yet mankind in a short time degenerated again; and sunk apace towards the same state of depravation, that

* Such as the notions of *expiation* by *sacrifice*; of a *Mediator* between *God* and *men*, &c; the custom of *sacrificing*; and the observation of the *sabbath*, or keeping *holy* the *seventh* day, &c.

we have represented them to have been in before the flood.

Now, that the world should degenerate so fast, and forget so soon the first principles of true religion, is what seems, in the opinion of a noble author, to be utterly incredible. But his opinion of things would have been very different, had he read the Scripture, as he ought to have done, with less prejudice, and with more attention. For then he would have found it so far from being “impossible, for *any* man in his senses to believe, that a tradition, derived from God himself, should be lost, in the course of so few generations, amongst the greatest part of mankind; or, that polytheism and idolatry should be established on the ruins of it in the days of Serug, before those of Abraham, and so soon after the deluge*—” that, on the contrary, *every* man in his senses, who considers the tendencies and operations of things, must necessarily conclude from the account which the sacred historian has given us, that such corruptions would take place;

* Lord BOLINGBROKE'S Works, vol. IV. Essay II. p. 20.

and,

and, unless prevented by some extraordinary providence, be likely to extirpate the knowledge and worship of the true God from off the face of the whole earth.

It shall therefore be my business in this Discourse, to explain, in the

First place, how these corruptions came to be introduced; or, in other words, how idolatry and wickedness came to spread and prevail in the world so very soon after the deluge.

And, when they did prevail, to shew, in the

Second place, how excellently well the miracle of the text, the confusion of languages, was adapted to check their increase and progress.

When the deluge had retired, and the ground was become capable of fresh cultivation, God, for the encouragement of Noah, to proceed with alacrity in that necessary work, declared—that, notwithstanding the future provocations of men, he was fully determined, never to destroy the earth again, in the manner he had now done. But, as
there

there appeared then no evil in the world, Noah perhaps might wonder, whence those future-provocations could arise; or what could possibly give occasion to them. Hence therefore the declaration, at the same time that it brought him the assurance he wanted, led him to the knowledge of the point he sought. For thus said the Lord—"I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; though the imagination of man's heart is evil from his YOUTH." Now here, when the *first* clause, "I will not again curse the ground," conveyed to Noah the necessary consolation; for what other purpose, but for his information concerning the introduction of evil, could the *latter* clause be added? And what else, in due construction of language, could he reasonably understand by it, but that, though iniquity had not sprung forth, yet God saw the latent seeds of it lurking in the heart of one of his sons? or rather, as it should seem by the turn of

7 Gen. vii. 21.

the expression, lurking in the heart of his *youngest* son, Ham².

As this sense of the passage stands supported by the grammatical construction, so is it confirmed by the event that followed. For we advance but a little way farther in the course of this history, before we discover a strange perverseness in the conduct of Ham: before we discover those seeds of iniquity, which had hitherto lain dormant in his heart, bursting out at once into a shameful irreverence towards his father, and horrid impiety against God: irreverence to his father, in openly exposing and deriding his nakedness³—impiety against God, by his taking occasion from thence, as the Jewish writers interpret the action, to make the promise of the Messiah a subject of ridicule.

This was a crime of an heinous nature—as it evidently arose from a spirit of infidelity; tended to defeat the purpose of Providence; and also to destroy the hopes of the world. It was therefore a crime that

² Gen. ix. 24.

³ Ibid. 22.

deserved

deserved to be severely punished. And accordingly God, having obviated the mischiefs of it by a repetition of the promise to Shem and Japheth, passed upon Ham a judgment suitable to his profaneness and impiety. He cut him off from the blessing he had despised; and devoted his posterity to the grievous curse of being “servants of servants to their brethren ^b.”

When Ham and his posterity found themselves under this malediction, and clearly deserted of God; it is natural to conclude, that they, in their turn, deserted him; and totally renounced his religion and service: It is natural to conclude, that in their subsequent separation from the rest of their brethren, who were now become odious to them, they chose for themselves *new* gods, as their guides and protectors in their *new* settlement. They settled, it should seem, first in Arabia; commonly stiled in Scripture, “*the East*.” But where-ever they settled, they carried with them a sense of the curse: and that sense would naturally prompt them

^b Gen. ix. 25---27.

to provide against it, as well as they could. The best provision they could perhaps think of, might be the exercise of arms: to which therefore, it is to be supposed, they would apply themselves in a special manner. And hence they might soon become, as the history tells us they did become, “mighty ones in the earth^c.” Conscious of their own strength, and elated perhaps with the appearance of security, they might think now of reversing the doom; and instead of submitting to be subject to their brethren, might arrogantly attempt to bring their brethren into subjection to themselves.

Thus one would reason on the principles of nature. And in exact conformity to this train of reasoning, Moses assures us, that they actually “made a journey,” that is, a warlike expedition, “from the East^d ;” passed over the Euphrates; and violently seized on “the land of Shinar,” which was part of the

^c Gen. x. 8.

^d Gen. xi. 2. where the word *יָדָה* signifies not only to *journey*, but to *journey* with an *hostile intent*. See DAUBEN on the Revel. ch. xvii. 5.

inheritance of the sons of Shem. The inhabitants of this land they soon subdued: and then, in the true spirit of policy, built cities or forts at convenient distances, to awe, and keep them in proper subjection. “From hence they went out into Assyria^e,” made there the like conquest; and built cities with the like intent—to secure the fidelity and obedience of the vanquished^f.

This was a deep-laid scheme; excellently calculated to support their tyranny; and therefore worthy of the historian’s notice, however it may have escaped the notice of his readers. The author of this scheme (planned, by the bye, as an introduction chiefly to a still more daring one) was Nimrod, the

^e Gen. x. 11. See the *marginal* reading; the Targ. of ONKELOS, and of JON. B. UZIEL; BOCHART. Phaleg lib. iv. c. xii. p. 259, &c. Others, following the reading of the text, maintain that Ahur built Nineveh, and not Nimrod.

^f If we suppose Ninus to be the same with Nimrod, the main lines of this account, however distorted, may yet be traced in the history of Ctesias, copied by Diodorus Siculus, Biblioth. Histor. lib. ii. in principio.

grandson of Ham ; whom the Scripture stiles in our version, “ a mighty hunter *before* the Lord^s ;” but some of the ancient interpreters of Scripture, “ a mighty rebel *against* the Lord^h.”

That he was indeed a “ rebel,” his very *name* impliesⁱ : and that his rebellion consisted principally in idolatry, is the general suffrage of all antiquity. That he conveyed his idolatrous principles and practices into every place, where he carried his arms, is not only probable from the early custom, which obtained in the world, of obliging the conquered nations to embrace the religion of the conquerors ; but is incontestably

^s Gen. x. 9.

^h The Jerusalem Targum, as also that of JON. B. UZIEL, translates the words thus—Ipse (Nimrod) incepit esse potens in peccato, et ad rebellandum coram Domina in terra. Vide in Gen. x. 8. Ita LXX. Γίγνεσθαι ἐν αἰτίᾳ καγίᾳ.

ⁱ The name נִמְרוֹד Nimrod comes from מָרַד rebellavit, and was given him by his enemies, the Assyrians, who were descended from Shear. His prior name, among his own people, was probably בַּעַל or בֶּל, Baal or Bel ; and that of his city בֵּית בֶּל Beth-Bel—to both which names respectively there seems to be a keen and close allusion in the subsequent words בָּלַל and בָּבֶל. Gen. xi. 9.

certain

certain from the traces we find, and the accounts we read of him, in ancient authors. It is expressly said, that he taught the Chaldeans, Persians, and Assyrians the worship of FIRE^k; and, that he introduced among them the use and exercise of *magical* arts—for which he was highly celebrated by the MAGI. A plain proof how very fast, and extensively wide, his idolatrous institutions prevailed in the world.

Now, as these practices and opinions prevailed, the true religion must of course decline: and more especially in those regions that were subject to the dominion of this infidel tyrant. But those were chiefly the regions inhabited by the descendants of Shem: which leads us to account, in a very easy manner, for that hitherto unaccountable phænomenon, “The early corruption of this sacred line; even in its purest and most sacred branch.” For it is not improbable, but this zealous idolater might, as the Jerusalem Targumist declares he did, make a

^k CLEMENT. Recognit. lib. I. § xxx. CLEMENT. Homil. IX, § iii, iv. &c. Chron. Alexand. et EUTYCH. Annal.

decree among the people, “that they should every-where renounce the religion of Shem, and embrace his own institutions¹.”

But Nimrod’s project did not terminate here. He had still farther and more pernicious views. What he had gained by his sword, and introduced by his power, he designed to maintain, confirm and perpetuate. His intention, in short, was, to form an universal empire; and to settle and establish his religion and government among all people. In pursuance of this design, when he had finished his conquests (for such is the natural order of things, and therefore the real order of the history) he fixed his eyes on Babel; which, as it “was the *beginning*,” he determined now to make also the *capital*, “of his kingdom^m.” Accordingly he enlarged and improved it, as a fit seat for the civil

¹ וַאֲמַר לָהֶן, רָחֲקוּ וּנְנו. Et dixit eis, “Recedite a religione Sem, et adhaerete ad instituta Nimrod.” Vide in Gen. x. 9.

^m Gen. x. 10. See also CRESIAS. ap. DIOD. Sicul. ubi supra. Whose chief error is, that he mistook Nineveh for Babel or Babylon.

magistrate;

magistrate; and therein established a *civil government*. He likewise built a tower in which, “whose top (not *might reach*, as we interpolate, but) *was consecrated*, to the heavensⁿ,” that is, to the heavenly bodies, and particularly to the sun; and so provided for the support of *religion*. That this tower was intended for religious use, the altar on its top is a plain indication. And though the reason assigned for its *pyramidal* form, as being a proper representation of the *spiring* nature of flame or fire, may perhaps be the refinement of later ages; yet, it clearly shews that, in the opinion of those ages, it was originally built for a temple of the sun^o, whose symbol is *fire*, that very element, which the builder of this tower first taught

ⁿ Gen. xi. 4.

^o HERODOTUS observes (Lib. I. c. 181, 183.) that the tower of Babylon was sacred to BEL, i. e. to the sun. See p. 114. note f. And that sacrifices were offered to him on the great altar in the upper story. The pyramids of Egypt, built by this very people, I mean the descendants of Ham, were designed for the same purpose; viz. for *temples*, as well as *sepulchres*. Whence that of the poet, Votaque Pyramidum celsas solvuntur ad aras. See more in TENISON of Idolatry, ch. iv. p. 42, &c.

the nations to worship; and now intended they should worship for ever.

Such was his grand project. And in order to bring his people the more readily to embrace this project, he artfully told them—that it was the only way “they could make themselves a *name*;^r” the only way they could advance themselves to dignity and renown; and maintain their superiority over the rest of the world—that, if they broke this league and union, and divided into separate parties, they would fall into the snare that was laid for them^q; would be easily vanquished in that state of dispersion; and so, being made slaves to their brethren, would become an ignoble and *nameless* race.

^r Gen. xi. 4. *Faciamus nobis* עָשׂוּ *nomen*; famam, celebritatem. Sic, Gen. vi. 4. *Illi heroes a seculo* אֲנֹשֵׁי הָעָשׂוּ *viri nominis*; nobiles, celebres. Job xxx. 8. *Filii* בְּלִי שֵׁם *absque nomine*; nullius nominis, ignobiles. SCHINDLER. Lexic. in radice עָשׂוּ.

^q For Josephus says, Περιβλεψαν δὲ τῷ παρεχέμεν τῆς τῆ θεῶ γνώμης, κ. τ. λ. “that to their disobedience to the divine will, they added the suspicion, that they were therefore ordered to send out separate colonies, that, being divided asunder, they might the more easily be oppressed.” Antiq. Jud. lib. I. c. iv. § 1.

This

This, it seems, worked on their minds, and engaged them all in that bold undertaking^r; which, had it not been interrupted by heaven, would certainly have been accomplished in a short time. For when they had once made this beginning, “there was nothing,” humanly speaking, (as they were all of one language and one mind) “that could restrain them from doing whatever they farther imagined to do^s.” They were a strong and warlike people; and, having already acquired great conquests, would soon have brought other nations (ignorant of arms, and intent only on the cultivation of the earth) subject to their authority and power: and all these nations, thus subdued, they would easily have incorporated into one

^r Here it may be necessary to apprize the reader, that I do not think Nimrod’s people, viz. the descendants of Ham, to be the *only* people engaged in this attempt: *many* of the *other* lines, and especially of the line of Shem, whom he had lately conquered, probably joined themselves to him; admiring his fortune, state, and magnificence. But the *principal agents* were his own people.

^s Gen. xi, 6.

general

general empire, by that strongest band of union, the general establishment of the same *civil* and *religious* institutions.

Now, had this design taken place, and been effectually carried into execution; the whole purpose of Providence, with regard to the world, would have been utterly crossed and defeated. For the union of mankind under one monarchy would, of course, have prevented their dispersion; at least for a considerable time: Nor would it then have proceeded in that orderly manner, in which God had directed it to be carried on. In the meanwhile, the establishment of *idolatry* by *law* would have soon suppressed, and at length extinguished, the *true religion*. And then, impiety and immorality of every kind (already, doubtless, but too rife among them) would have continually increased, and extended their contagion: and this concerted universal empire would necessarily have become one horrid scene of universal wickedness^t.

^t Revel. examined, &c. vol. II. dissert. iii. p. 99, &c.

When

When the adjustment of things, not only pointed, but had begun to operate to this destructive end; it is surely no more than what reason leads us to expect, that God, in compassion to mankind, as well as in vindication of his own authority, should graciously exert his power, and employ such means as his wisdom should direct, to defeat so ruinous a project. Agreeably therefore to this expectation, the Lord is represented as coming down from heaven “to see the *city* and the *tower*—” to inspect the scheme of *religion* and *government*—“which the children of men,” these daring infidels, “had planned and erected.” And finding it so contrary to the real interest and happiness of mankind, he immediately enters into this resolution:—“Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence,” says the text, “upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.” And by what means he effected their

“Gen. xi. 7, 8.

dispersion,

dispersion, is more particularly explained in the following verse:—"Therefore is the name of the city called *Babel*," (viz. *confusion*) "because the Lord did there *confound* the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad on the face of all the earth^x:" that is, when God, by the confusion of their language, had divided them into distinct tribes; the natural consequence was, that those tribes, separating from each other, formed themselves into so many distinct nations; and finally settled in distinct parts of the world^y.

And here, it is worth our while to observe, in the

Second place, How apt an instance this is, as well of the wisdom, as of the power of God: where we see it so amazingly fitted in every respect to the circumstances of things, and the proceedings of this people: fitted to defeat and overthrow their scheme—fitted to convince them of their folly and madness in concerting it—and equally fitted to de-

^x Gen. ix. 9.

^y HESTIÆUS apud EUSEB, Pr. Ev. lib. ix. cap. 15.

liver the world from the mischiefs intended by it.

As their scheme was planned, in defiance of heaven, to keep them close and united together, in order the better to obviate the curse that was denounced against them; what can we conceive more effectually adapted, to render them sensible of the absurdity of their attempt, than this strange confusion of their language?—whereby the Almighty disunited them again; and so reduced them to that divided state, which must necessarily expose them to the whole weight of the malediction? And that this was effected by the hand of God they must needs perceive from the nature of the transaction. For as their language (to speak at the lowest) could be confounded only, by dividing it into several dialects; and giving their organs a new, instantaneous ply, diversly adapted to the different inflections, tones, and modifications of those several dialects²; so the
actual

² Various, I know, are the sentiments of the learned on this subject. Most of them, however, admit—that the language of
these

actual introduction of such confusion must evidently be the result of divine power: a power which shewed them, in this instance as in many others, how easy it was for him, “to make the devices of the people of none effect, and bring to nought the counsels of princesⁱ.”

And as they united together, not only for their own defence, but also with a view of reducing the posterity of Shem and Japheth under the power and dominion of their sole monarchy—in consequence of which idolatry and wickedness must have increased among them; what surer method could Providence contrive, to free the world from the tyranny of Nimrod; to restore it back to

these builders was certainly *confounded*. And as the degree of confusion here specified, was sufficient to answer the end proposed; so, that it was in reality no greater, the *radical affinity*, still subsisting between the several *oriental* languages, seems to me to be a plain proof. Consult Is. CASAUB. in *Adversariis*, De *Linguarum Confusione*. Many are of opinion, that *new* languages were now introduced. But surely there is a great deal of difference between *forming new* languages (of which the Scripture says not a word) and *confounding that* which was before in use.

^a Ps. xxxiii. 10.

its primeval divisions ; and to hinder its being corrupted in any higher degree from that quarter, than this which he now employed ? For by thus confounding the language of Nimrod and all his adherents, and thereby dividing them into separate, enfeebled parties ; God did not only open a way for the conquered nations to assert their liberty, and migrate according to the patriarchal appointment ; but he likewise cut off, in a great measure, all farther connection, intercourse, and communication between *them* and this wicked people ; and even between the several divisions of this very people themselves : which must necessarily restrain the overflowings of iniquity, by dividing the current, and reducing it into narrower bounds.

But this is not all. For the judgment we are now considering, however severe, was mercifully calculated as well to improve this wretched people, as to bless and benefit the rest of the world. In consequence of the confusion, they divided, of course, into so

many distinct and different societies, as there were different languages spoken among them. Now, as these several societies (separating, I apprehend, under a divine impulse, and therefore according to the divine designation) would form themselves, whenever they settled, into distinct governments, under their several heads; so these several governments must necessarily contribute, in a very eminent degree, to the restraint of vice, and the advancement of virtue. For, being constitutionally obliged, each of them, to provide for the general good; they must needs take care, that the conduct and behaviour of every individual should conspire to the welfare and happiness of the whole. But the welfare of every society depends, in a special manner, on the peace and harmony, on the courage and fidelity, and on the industry, temperance, and frugality, which reign among those who compose it. And therefore the members of such new-formed states must, and we suppose did, zealously cultivate, and diligently exert these

these necessary virtues for their own advantage.

Add to this, that the very jealousies and emulations which must unavoidably arise between state and state; the necessity of defending themselves one against another; and the ambition of equalling or excelling each other: These must keep them constantly on their guard, and attentive to the strictest discipline^b.—And as they were, on the one hand, forcible means to withhold them from every thing base and injurious; so were they, on the other, as powerful incentives to great, noble, and praise-worthy actions. And whatever, be it remembered, was gained hereby to the account of virtue, was so much more than could possibly have been obtained, had the world continued, as was now projected, under the loose administration of one general empire.

But this division of nations carried with it another advantage; and became subser-

^b BURNETT'S B. Lect. vol. II. p. 131. 8vo.

many distinct and different societies, as there were different languages spoken among them. Now, as these several societies (separating, I apprehend, under a divine impulse, and therefore according to the divine designation) would form themselves, whenever they settled, into distinct governments, under their several heads; so these several governments must necessarily contribute, in a very eminent degree, to the restraint of vice, and the advancement of virtue. For, being constitutionally obliged, each of them, to provide for the general good; they must needs take care, that the conduct and behaviour of every individual should conspire to the welfare and happiness of the whole. But the welfare of every society depends, in a special manner, on the peace and harmony, on the courage and fidelity, and on the industry, temperance, and frugality, which reign among those who compose it. And therefore the members of such new-formed states must, and we suppose did, zealously cultivate, and diligently exert these

these

these necessary virtues for their own advantage.

Add to this, that the very jealousies and emulations which must unavoidably arise between state and state ; the necessity of defending themselves one against another ; and the ambition of equalling or excelling each other : These must keep them constantly on their guard, and attentive to the strictest discipline^b.—And as they were, on the one hand, forcible means to withhold them from every thing base and injurious ; so were they, on the other, as powerful incentives to great, noble, and praise-worthy actions. And whatever, be it remembered, was gained hereby to the account of virtue, was so much more than could possibly have been obtained, had the world continued, as was now projected, under the loose administration of one general empire.

But this division of nations carried with it another advantage ; and became subser-

^b BURNETT'S B. Lect. vol. II. p. 131. 8vo.

vient to a still higher end. It laid the foundation for a more natural, and more equal dispensation of things. For, under this circumstance, Providence could distribute both rewards and punishments, in separate and exact proportions, according to the deserts of every state. If any state became signally virtuous above its neighbours; God might bless it with signal favours, without its neighbours partaking of the benefit: or, if it unhappily sunk into vice and wickedness, there was now no need of any immediate correction from above; but one people might be raised to correct and punish the faults of another, without the destruction of either. And if any people, regardless of these slighter inflictions, should continue still incorrigibly wicked, God might safely cut them off, without any danger of hurting the rest. Nay, their excision would be attended with this salutary effect, that it would serve as a warning and caution to others, not to offend by the like crimes, for fear they should fall under the like punishment. And all this, surely,

fuely, must be no small check to the seducing influence of bad examples, and the destructive contagion of vice.

Having thus traced the rise and progress of idolatry and wickedness in the first ages after the flood: And having also explained how wisely and properly the present dispensation, the confusion of languages, and the dispersion of nations, was calculated to restrain this growing impiety; and to preserve the knowledge of God in the world; I have only one reflection to make; and that reflection is this—that we should never despair of the final success, and firm establishment of true religion. It has been indeed often oppressed; and it may be so again. But as it is the religion of God, God, we may depend, will protect and support it. However unfavourable the circumstances of things may, at times, appear; yet the marvellous wisdom of Him, who has the government of the world in his hands, and who is so visibly concerned in the cause

of this religion, will make “all things work together at last” for its real “good” and advantage. If we look, at the time here commemorated, to the city of Babel, and the plains of Shinar; if we reflect on the decree which was then made, “that people should forsake the God of Shem, and cast off his religion and worship;” the prospect, it must be owned, is sad and dismal. But when we pursue the manifestations of Providence, and consider the effects of his subsequent operations; what comfort must it afford us to find again at a future period,—that from this very *place*, and from these very *plains*, there issued forth another decree, strictly commanding “all people, nations, and languages, to honour the God of the descendants of Shem; and to confess that He alone is the living God, and steadfast for ever; and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed?”^d

^c See note (1) p. 168.

^d Dan. vi, 25, 26. ch. iii, 29.

O Lord,

O Lord, how manifold are thy works!
and how adorable art thou in all thy doings,
O King of Saints! To Thee therefore, with
the Son and Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is
most due, all honour and glory, &c. *Amen.*

S E R M O N VIII.

GEN. xii. 1—3.

And the Lord said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee.

And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing.

And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

THOUGH the last-mentioned dispensation—the confusion of languages, and the dispersion of nations consequent thereupon—gave some check to the progress of vice and idolatry; yet is it evident, from
the

the accounts we have of the succeeding ages, that it did not entirely stop it. The depravation had been, alas! so warmly fostered, and had gained, as we have seen, such growth and vigour, under the government of Nimrod, that it still survived this signal judgment; and, spreading itself with the spreading nations, soon prevailed over the whole world. For when the family of Shem, who had peculiar motives to attach them to God, are known to have deviated very early ^c into the worship and service of false deities; what else can we think of the rest of the nations, who manifestly enjoyed much fewer advantages, but, that they accordingly sunk into groffer idolatries?

When mankind, thus universally immersed in idolatry, had lost the knowledge of God and his religion; how necessary was it for their real happiness, that some new measures should be employed, to bring them back to the recognition of his sovereignty, and the observance of his pure worship!

^c In about 400 years after the flood, for which we have accounted in the last discourse, p. 167.

But

But to restore at once the true religion, and to preserve it in any degree of purity, among a world of people so thoroughly depraved, would certainly have been a difficult, if not indeed an impracticable task. To facilitate therefore, and finally to secure this necessary point, God, in wisdom as well as kindness, called forth Abraham from his country and kindred, and made him the father of a new race and better generation: which was to be kept sequestered from the rest of the nations: and trained up in the true knowledge and worship of Himself, and in the true faith of that fundamental principle of revealed religion, and powerful motive to virtuous obedience—the promise of a Redeemer.

Now Abraham was fixed upon, not from any fondness or partial affection, but because he was a person of eminent character, and endowed with proper qualifications for the purpose: one who had already given sufficient testimony of his aversion to idolatry, and of his firm attachment to the God of heaven. For he had boldly maintained against his own country-men, “that there was
but

but one God, the creator of the universe : and that the other gods," whom they adored,—the sun, moon and stars—" were only instruments in his hands : and if they contributed any thing to the happiness of men, that each of them afforded it by *his* appointment ; and not by their *own* power.^f And, in defence of this doctrine, he had been, if we may believe Maimonides, in imminent danger of losing his life.^g

As he was therefore a person well disposed towards God, himself ; so God foreknew, that he would take care^h to command his children, and his household after him, to observe and keep the way of the Lord^h : " and thereby approve himself an agent fit, in every respect, to be intrusted with the conduct of that grand design, which he was chosen to guide and carry forwards ;

But, though God made choice of Abraham and his posterity for the guardians of his

^f JOSEPH. Antiq. Jud. lib. 1. c. vii. § 1.

^g Mor. Nevoch. p. 111. c. xxix. Vide HORTING. Smeg. Orient. c. viii. § 19.

^h Gen. xviii. 19.

true religion ; and consequently favoured them with peculiar privileges ; yet is it by no means to be supposed, that he dropt his regard for the rest of the world, and had no farther concern for other people. The dispensation was meant for the general good ; for the common benefit of all mankind. For the text expressly informs us, that by and from the call of Abraham, “all the families of the earth were to derive a blessing.” And it was no small part of this blessing, that God, having appointed him and the succeeding patriarchs to be the public vouchers of his being and providence, sent them out to bear his name before the nations ; to correct the errors they had unhappily imbibed ; and to instruct them in the ways of truth and righteousness.

In consequence therefore of this appointment, and in pursuance of this gracious design, we meet these holy men in the most renowned and conspicuous places—in Chaldea, Canaan, and Egypt, the foster-lands and nurseries of idolatry—we meet them, I say, in these places, proclaiming and announcing

nouncing the unity of the Deity; asserting his supremacy against all oppositionⁱ; raising altars to the honour of his majesty^k; and invoking him, in their solemn acts, under the distinguished character of “the most high God, the creator of heaven and earth^l.”

Add to these, the frequent conferences they are said to have held with the priests of the nations among whom they sojourned; and the conclusive arguments they are reported to have brought in confutation of their vain opinions^m; and what can you conceive better adapted, either to reform the ignorance of those nations, or to confirm the faith of their own people? For as these conferences, in which they displayed a vast superiority of knowledge and wisdom, could not fail of correcting, in some degree, the popular errors and superstitions of the times; and of

ⁱ JOSEPH. Ant. Jud. et MAIM. Mor. Nev. ubi supra.

^k Gen. xii. 7, 8.—xiii. 18.—xxvi. 25.—xxviii. 18, 19.—xxxi. 20.—xxxv. 7.

^l Gen. xiv. 22. Heb. קִנְיַת שְׁמַיִם וָאֲדָמָה LXX. ὅς ἐκτίσας τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν. Vide Lud. de Dien in loc.

^m Vide JOSEPH. MAIN. HOTTINGER, ubi supra.

bringing

bringing those, with whom they conversed, to a juster notion of God and his providence; so the constant practice they used, of setting up altars, where-ever they came, for the worship of the true God, was not only an exemplary proof of their own high sense of the divine majesty, and their continual dependance upon him; but also a noble and excellent method to teach and encourage their children and families to “set the Lord ever before them, and in all their ways to acknowledge Him.”

It is also to be observed, that these pious patriarchs were highly favoured in all their migrations; and eminently distinguished among the neighbouring princes. Even “kings were reprov’d for their sakes.” And as these kings were acquainted with their prophetic character, and desired their prayers and intercession with God^a; so the relief they obtained, in consequence of that intercession, must needs dispose both them and their subjects, to listen for the future with more attention to those spiritual exhortations,

^a Gen. xii. 17. — xx. 7.

counsels and instructions, which these holy men of God most probably joined to the other instances of their kindness.

Nor should it here be forgotten, that their numerous tribes of “men-servants and maid-servants,” whether received as presents, or purchased with money, became in the event, by the care they took of their education and conduct, just so many proselytes, gained over to the true religion.

So early did the promise, “that in Abraham and his posterity the several nations of the earth should be blessed,” begin to operate in the world: and so comprehensive was it, as to take in all ranks and degrees among them; and especially those of the lowest rank; who perhaps then, as in the days of the Gospel, were of all others the most sincere, and the most open to conviction. And with regard to these menial servants, as they were commanded, “though strangers,” to be circumcised; and accordingly partook, with the Abrahamic seed, of the rite of circumcision^o; we may justly, I

^o Gen. xvii. 12, 13.

think,

I think, look upon them, as a kind of “first-fruits of the Gentiles;” who carried in their admission a manifest token, that, notwithstanding the peculiarity then established, all the Gentiles would be adopted at last, and share the benefits of the divine covenant.

In a scheme of such consequence, evidently calculated for the common good, but attended in the execution with great difficulties, it is natural to expect, that the hand of Omnipotence would be often exerted for the support of its several parts. Indeed, the patriarchal age was altogether an age of miracles—which every eye, that views the circumstances under which they were wrought, may easily discover the propriety of; and which therefore require no distinct or particular explanation. Some of these miracles manifestly tended to comfort and sustain the patriarchs in their troubles; and others to animate and spur them on in their great and arduous undertakings. But they all conspired to render them powerful, illustrious and eminent: And that power and eminence, to which they were advanced,

served to promote the general design, and to forward the scheme of Providence. For, as the intercourse and conversation of the patriarchs brought the true, genuine religion to the knowledge of the nations; so did their prosperity and marvellous successes recommend it likewise to their practice. For since all the people among whom they sojourned, were every where attentive to the concerns of this world, and eagerly ambitious of temporal grandeur; it was but natural for them, when they observed the prosperity of the worshipers of Jehovah, to make inquiry—what God he was, that could confer such blessings; and what kind of services could procure and ascertain them: it was but natural for them to worship him too after the like manner, in expectation of receiving the like rewards.

Nor is this only a specious surmise of what might possibly be, but rather a plain and simple narration of what really was, the case. For several of the Eastern nations appear to have adopted the patriarchal rites; and to have reformed their religion to, what they

they thought, the patriarchal purity. In proof of what is said, let it here be remarked, that as history informs us, of Abraham's conversing on the subject of religion with the most learned Egyptians; and of his being highly esteemed and honoured by them^p; so we have reason to conclude from the same history, that they derived, among other religious institutes, the rite of circumcision, which they practised, from him. But should this be doubted, certain however we are—that the Magians, Sabians, Persians and Indians, all gloried in him, as the great reformer of their religion^q. And of the Persians it is recorded in particular, that they adhered so strictly to this reformed religion, as to keep clear of the most gross idolatry for ages and ages after. Nor is this any more, than what might reasonably be expected from other people, as well as from the inhabitants of Persia. For whatever improvements Abraham introduced into the religion

^p JOSEPH. Ant. Jud. lib. I. c. viii. §. 2.

^q HYDE De Rel. Vet. Pers. c. ii. iii. PRIDEAUX's Connect. p. I. b. iv. an. 486.

of the several nations; these, we may suppose, the rest of the patriarchs, wherever they came, were solicitous to cultivate, promote, and confirm, as far as their influence extended.

But the care which the great Father of the universe thus graciously employed for the reformation and amendment of the world at large, was now to be more especially directed and applied to the welfare and security of his peculiar people. The chosen branch of Abraham's family was at this time increasing very fast. And as they were to be kept, for the preservation of their religion, in a state separate from all other nations; so it became necessary, that a suitable place should be provided for them, where they might commodiously and securely live by themselves. But, since the world around them was already inhabited, it is hard to conceive where they could live so sequestered, unless they were removed into some desolate country; which yet, would have been utterly inconsistent with, and entirely subversive of, the principal design of their separation. For
as

as they were separated not so much for their own sake, as for the sake of the whole world; for the conveyance and propagation of the true religion; it was therefore necessary, for the benefit of the world, that they should be seen, known, and observed; and that they should be conversed with likewise, in some distant manner, by the several people around them. Now all this manifestly tends to increase the difficulty. For to be totally separated from, and yet, at the same time, perpetually conversant with, other people; is what appears, according to human estimation, absolutely impracticable. “But what is impossible with man, is very possible with God.” And here we cannot but admire his *wisdom*, who found out, and evacuated a land for them; I mean that of Goshen; in every respect suitable to the purpose: A land, where they might live distinct by themselves, and yet daily converse with the most celebrated nation then upon earth: A land lately deserted by the *shepherd kings* and their subjects; and therefore the most fitly adapted

for the reception of *shepherds* again^r. Nor can we less admire his *goodness*, who, when he had “spied out this land for them,” was pleased to detach “from his country and kindred” another person of eminent qualities and great piety; and to send him—“even Joseph, who was sold to be a bond-servant^s—” as a kind of ambassador before them, to procure an interest for their settlement in it.

Now a slave in a strange country must appear to human view a very unpromising instrument of success in a matter of such importance. But the lower his condition was at first, the better it served to illustrate the interposals of divine Providence in the several stages of his advancement afterwards. For the hand of God is visible in every step; and his wonders enter into almost every

^r See BRYAN¹'s Observations on the ancient History of Egypt, &c. p. 140, &c. Art. “Of the Shepherds in Egypt, and the Land of Goshen,” and the other Articles connected therewith. See particularly p. 159. And LE CLERC's Com. on Gen. xlv. 34. only what he says of the Egyptian should be transferred to the Arabian shepherds.

^s Psal. cv. 17.

transaction.

transaction. These wonders performed in favour of Joseph, are too numerous to be recited, and too obvious to be explained. This only need we remark concerning them, that in whatever degree they promoted his particular and personal interest; in the very same degree they contributed also to advance the general design of his mission; to open the way for a more favourable reception of his brethren and their families, and for their more commodious settlement, whenever they came.

When God had thus, by the mediation of Joseph, provided for the settlement of the children of Israel; he then introduced them into the land of Egypt under all the advantages, with which they could possibly wish to be introduced. Their relation to Joseph, who was universally esteemed, recommended them to the favour of the king and his subjects. In consequence of this favour, they were placed in a large and fertile district; where they multiplied, and grew, and gathered strength; and yet, by their very occupation, were still kept a separate people.

for the reception of *shepherds* again^r. Nor can we less admire his *goodness*, who, when he had “spied out this land for them,” was pleased to detach “from his country and kindred” another person of eminent qualities and great piety; and to send him—“even Joseph, who was sold to be a bond-servant^s—” as a kind of ambassador before them, to procure an interest for their settlement in it.

Now a slave in a strange country must appear to human view a very unpromising instrument of success in a matter of such importance. But the lower his condition was at first, the better it served to illustrate the interposals of divine Providence in the several stages of his advancement afterwards. For the hand of God is visible in every step; and his wonders enter into almost every

^r See BRYAN^t's Observations on the ancient History of Egypt, &c. p. 140, &c. Art. “Of the Shepherds in Egypt, and the Land of Goshen,” and the other Articles connected therewith. See particularly p. 159. And LE CLERC's Com. on Gen. xlv. 34. only what he says of the Egyptian should be transferred to the Arabian shepherds.

^s Psal. cv. 17.

transaction. These wonders performed in favour of Joseph, are too numerous to be recited, and too obvious to be explained. This only need we remark concerning them, that in whatever degree they promoted his particular and personal interest; in the very same degree they contributed also to advance the general design of his mission; to open the way for a more favourable reception of his brethren and their families, and for their more commodious settlement, whenever they came.

When God had thus, by the mediation of Joseph, provided for the settlement of the children of Israel; he then introduced them into the land of Egypt under all the advantages, with which they could possibly wish to be introduced. Their relation to Joseph, who was universally esteemed, recommended them to the favour of the king and his subjects. In consequence of this favour, they were placed in a large and fertile district; where they multiplied, and grew, and gathered strength; and yet, by their very occupation, were still kept a separate people.

Here they lived after their own manner; and not only enjoyed the free exercise of their religion themselves, but had also many and frequent opportunities of imparting something of it to others around them. For it is very apparent from the Mosaic history, that the Hebrews were never held in such detestation or abhorrence by the Egyptians, but that they would freely converse, though “they might not eat bread, with them.”

In these conversations, then, it could not be, but that a people so signally supported by the Lord, would be continually extolling the excellency of his majesty—rehearsing the wonders of his various dispensations—and so infusing into the minds of the Egyptians noble ideas of his being and providence—the surest foundation of virtuous improvement.

What effects the irruption of the Cuscan shepherds, and their long tyrannical dominion over the land of Egypt, had produced before on the religion of its inhabitants, we cannot precisely determine. But as we know

* Gen. xliii. 32.

they were gross idolaters, and brought with them all the rites and institutions of Zabianism, together with the worship of fire; it is certain they could not improve, but must rather debase, the religious sentiments of that people^u;—who, yet, must become still more perverted in their morals, by the continual exertions of those hostile passions, which they were daily provoked to exercise in opposition to their cruel oppressors. For a state of perpetual war and confusion is a state of perpetual wickedness and immorality.

And if the confused and oppressed state of the Egyptians tended thus, for a length of time, to efface the truth, and diminish the power of religion among them; what can you imagine better adapted to restore the practice of piety and virtue, than the marvellous exaltation of Joseph? Being adopted into the order, and placed at the head, of the priesthood; his gratitude to God, as well as his concern for the welfare of the people, would doubtless prompt him to communi-

^u Vide MANETH. apud. JOSEPH. contra APION. lib. I. § 14. And BRYANT'S Observations, &c. p. 150.

cate to them so much of the true, genuine religion, as they were capable of receiving, and applying to their profit. If “he informed their princes after his will,” he certainly could not forget to “teach their senators this true wisdom*.” And whatever ordinances he might think proper to make in relation to this subject; his reduction of the several provinces into one kingdom under the government of one monarch, made it easy for him to convey and establish them throughout the land. And that he thought proper, in fact, to make some decrees, and enact certain statutes, which, we may justly suppose, had reference to *religious*, as well as *civil* matters, is expressly asserted of him†. Nor did his decrees fail of their effect. For it is visible, I think, on the face of the history, that the Egyptians became, under his wise administration, much better men, and much better subjects, than they seem to have been before.

* Psal. cv. 22.

† The Targums make frequent mention of the *decrees* or *statutes* of JOSEPH.

If they fell off and degenerated afterwards; if, upon the accession of a “new,” and more arbitrary, “king into the throne of Egypt;” one “who *knew* not,” that is, as Onkelos² explains it, “who *approved* not the statutes of Joseph;” if at this time, I say, they began to relapse into vice and superstition; how kindly and beneficently was it ordained by heaven, that the Israelites should then dwell among them—hold up to them the light of truth—and shew them the paths of virtue and goodness?

That the Israelites then kept firm to their religion, and held forth to their neighbours a good example (however they might afterwards be infected by them) is a point which admits of no dispute. It is plainly implied in the counsel of this “new king³,” that, finding them a distinct people, he had made some attempts to abolish the distinction; to incorporate them with the rest of the nation, and melt them down into the common mass. But, in the sure confidence they had, of being

² Targ. in Exod. i. 8.

³ See Ex. i. 10. and the Commentators thereon.

brought

brought at length out of that land; their distinction and religion they *would* still preserve. And *this*, I apprehend, was the first and chief occasion of their afflictions; though afterwards aggravated on other accounts. These afflictions however, among other ends, afforded them fair and frequent opportunities of displaying many noble, though passive virtues. And their dispersion through the land^b opened at the same time a still larger and wider field, wherein they might sow the seeds of religion. Nor did the seeds they sowed entirely perish. They struck root among the people; and produced at length no inconsiderable harvest to the Lord. For when the Israelites departed out of Egypt, we are expressly told, that “a great multitude went also with them^c,” who are all, with good reason, supposed, to have been so many proselytes to the true religion.

^b Exod. I. 11. 14.—V. 12.

^c Exod. xij. 38. Heb. “A numerous mixture.” The Targum of JONATHAN makes them numerous indeed. Vide in loc. Of these how many soever they were, STRABO, on the strength of ancient tradition, says, that, “being instructed by Moses, they renounced their idolatrous worship, and accompanied him in his march out of Egypt.” Geogr. lib. xvi p. 760, &c.

Thus

Thus then we see, which was the point to be cleared, that the patriarchal dispensation was graciously planned for the general benefit of the nations: that it was calculated to correct their idolatrous opinions, and to reform their vitiated manners: that it was designed to inspire the heathens with a due sense of the being and providence of God; and to confirm his peculiar and chosen people in the belief of the promised Redeemer. In short, that it was meant and fitted for the improvement of all—to prepare the world for the reception of that grand blessing, which was to be poured upon it in the fulness of time.

Ends these, great and good—truly worthy of their divine author! and ends, which, accomplished, claim our warmest and most grateful praise.

Therefore, to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour, glory, &c. *Amen.*

S E R M O N . IX.

J U D E, ver. 7.

Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them, in like manner giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

IT was observed in a preceding Discourse, that the confusion of languages, and the division of nations consequent thereupon, were attended, among other effects, with this great and peculiar advantage—“that God could at any time, when a people became incurably wicked, cut them off by a signal destruction,

destruction, without hurting the rest of the world: nay, that their excision might eventually serve, as a kind warning to those around them, not to offend by the like crimes, for fear they should fall under the like punishment^d.”

Now this we see most astonishingly verified in the case of the people mentioned in the text. For “Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth” to this day “for an example” to others; being entirely overthrown, and “suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.”

But before we come to explain the nature of this *catastrophe*—to vindicate the goodness and justice of God in so dreadful an infliction—and to consider the propriety of it, with respect to the ends it was intended to promote:—Before we come, I say, to discuss these points, we must previously investigate the real character of the inhabitants of these cities, in order to discover what kind

^d Sermon VII. p. 183.

of treatment their deeds and practices could equitably deserve.

Now, as it is well known, that this people was a branch of the descendants of Ham; so it may well be supposed, that they inherited something of the corrupt disposition of the original stock: upon which when they had ingrafted the principles of idolatry, it is easy to perceive what a luxuriant crop of evil fruits would naturally spring forth among them. For idolatry was ever the parent of vice: and it doubtless happened to *this*, as to all *other* people, that, “when they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind; not only to do those things which are not convenient^e, but also to work all uncleanness with greediness^f.”

By what steps they proceeded to this excess of wickedness, and by what special methods Providence attempted to correct their vices, we are not particularly informed: nor is it indeed to be expected we should, in so

^e Rom. i. 28.

^f Eph. iv. 19.

concise a history as that of Moses. But that they did, however, actually proceed to such enormities, even in spite of many and powerful motives to the contrary, this history, concise as it is, has given us sufficient assurance.

When Lot came first among them, it is expressly said, that “the men of Sodom were then wicked, and sinners before the Lord, exceedingly^g :” that they were men, who had rebelled against the true God ; had set up the worship of false deities^h ; and, in consequence of that worship, had plunged themselves into all kinds of vice and immorality ;—even the detestable practice of unnatural lusts.

But besides the influence of a false religion, there was another cause which contributed greatly to the same effect : and that was the fertility of their country. The abundance it produced, and the comforts it supplied, rendered them proud and haughty—

^g Gen. xiii. 13.

^h Colebant cultum alienum, et rebellabant in nomen Domini valde. Targ. in loc.

luxurious and effeminate—and consequently prone to all those vices, which are apt to flow from such dispositions. Hence the prophet Ezekiel, reproving Jerusalem for her wickedness and idolatries, says, “Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom—Pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her, and in her daughters; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed *abomination* before me: therefore I took them away as I saw fit¹.” And fitting indeed it was, that the Lord should punish them with peculiar severity, when they obstinately continued their wicked practices in plain contradiction to those providential documents, that were kindly meant, and excellently adapted, to awaken their attention, and lead them to repentance and amendment of life. For that many such providences were exercised towards them, is apparent from the account, which the Scripture has given us of them.

¹ Ch. xvi. 49, 50. See also JOSEPH. Ant. Jud. lib. I. c. xi. § 1.

When they began to pride themselves in their riches, and presumptuously to strengthen themselves in their wickedness; God brought upon them the king of Elam; who laid them under tribute, and held them in slavery *twelve* years*. This event, as it necessarily contributed to diminish their wealth; so it naturally tended to abate their pride, to suppress their luxury, to check their vices, and to quicken their powers in the various exercise of laudable industry. How far it operated to these good purposes, we cannot be certain: very probably in no high degree. For they were afterwards delivered into the hands of their enemies, who punished them, as well for their wickedness as their rebellion, by a grievous slaughter in the vale of Siddim—where numbers of them were killed; and the rest were carried away captive¹.

But in the midst of this severity, God still remembered mercy. For the captives were soon miraculously rescued, and brought back with all their goods, by that declared

* Gen. xiv. 4.

¹ Ibid. 8—11.

favourite of heaven, the holy patriarch Abraham.

Now this deliverance, which both Abraham and Melchizedek openly ascribed, in their presence, to “the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth^m,” ought in reason to have worked on their gratitude—to have led them to esteem this great God, as their guardian and protector—and to have engaged them for the future in his worship and service.

To guide and encourage them in this service they were providentially favoured with the example and conversation of Lot: A man, who was endowed with eminent virtues and great piety; a man, who had shewed himself their faithful friend and steadfast ally; a man, who was a near relation of that extraordinary person to whose kindness they were indebted for the recovery of their liberties, and the enjoyment of all they possessed; and consequently a man, whose admonitions and remonstrances would have had, one should think, their proper

^m Gen. xiv. 19, 20.

weight and influence upon them. But the return of power, and the influx of prosperity had so far debauched their minds, and corrupted their hearts, that they were now become quite impatient of all restraints, and resolutely bent on the full gratification of their vicious passions. On therefore they went without controul, to the sorrow and vexation of pious Lot, in their abominable and pernicious courses. “For that righteous man,” though he laboured to reclaim them for *twenty* years, was unable at last to make any serious impressions upon them: but, “seeing and hearing from day to day,” the repeated instances of their profligate and abandoned wickedness, fruitlessly “tormented his upright soul with their unlawful” and scandalous “proceedings”—” which rose at length to such enormities, as were truly grievous and intolerable. For to such a degree of impudence and profligacy were their actions now grown, that every one, endowed with any sense of virtue, who reads their history with the least attention,

ⁿ 2 Pet. ii. 7, 8.

must feel in his breast a strong and pungent indignation against them ; and presage in his mind, that God, in vindication of his neglected justice, was bound to inflict some speedy and remarkable judgment upon them. Their guilt was heinous, habitual, and general. They were not only “ abominable in their doings,” but unanimously abominable too. They all combined together in the same detestable purpose. “ The men of Sodom,” says the text, “ compassed the house around, both old and young, all the people from *every* quarter^o.” A combination, which proves them to be universally depraved, beyond imagination, and beyond recovery. For when all ranks of men unite in vice ; when they commit those things openly, which “ it is a shame even to speak of in secret ;” when the youth have lost all reverence for the aged, and dare expose their guilt to them, whom, of all others, they should hide it from ; when the aged have lost all reverence for themselves, and fear not to publish their shame to their sons, but

• Gen. xix. 4.

are rather forward to make them witnesses of their guilt and infamy: when this, I say, is the case; then is corruption evidently advanced to its last stage—that people is utterly abandoned—and, having no good principle left, that can be worked upon, is absolutely ripe for destruction^p.

And yet, even in this case, the Lord did not destroy them abruptly; but first communicated his intention to Abraham; and then allowed him to plead their cause, and urge what he could in arrest of judgment. And surely their defence could never have been placed in better hands. For, with what delicacy of address, with what softness of extenuation, with what earnestness of solicitude, and with what constancy of intercession did he argue for them? His conduct is imitable: And his concern and compassion for this devoted people can only be equalled by the gracious condescension of God; who mercifully admitted every plea, which Abraham thought proper to urge in their behalf. But Abraham had a proper sense, as well of

^p Rev. exam. vol. II. diss. v. p. 222.

justice, as of mercy ; and wisely considered, what was due to the majesty of God, as well as desirable on the part of man. And therefore when he perceived, that they were totally depraved ; when their spreading guilt had not left even the small number of “ *ten* righteous men among them ;” he patiently resigned them to the punishment they deserved—concluding either from former experiences, or assured perhaps by particular promise, that favour would be shewn to those few who had preserved their integrity ; and that a way would be opened for their safe deliverance. And here let it be observed, that if the faithful, benevolent, and compassionate Abraham found himself in equity obliged to give up the cause of this abandoned people ; it must certainly be some other principle, than the sense of humanity, or the love of virtue, that can prompt men now to resume their defence ; and arraign the justice of God in their punishment. But their efforts only prove, how miserably vice perverts the understanding.

Now

Now, the crying guilt of these cities being fully proved, and exposed to the world, in this conference with Abraham; and there being nothing left, which the merciful patriarch could alledge farther in bar of judgment; “the Lord” then opened the storehouse of vengeance; and “rained down upon Sodom and Gomorrah fire and brimstone out of heaven: and thereby overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and every thing that grew upon the ground. And lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace^a.”

This tremendous event, thus notified beforehand, and attended with such marvellous circumstances, carried in it a plain indication of its being brought about, not merely by the settled agency of second causes, (though some of these will appear to have been very properly made use of in it) but by the direct and immediate exertion of a divine power: and for the timely punishment of that abandoned race.

^a Gen. xix. 24, 25, 28.

Should it here be demanded, “ why God should choose to punish them in this, rather than in any other manner—” We return for answer, that, though there might be some reasons for it, which we cannot discover; yet are there others, obvious enough, which sufficiently justify the wisdom of Providence; and set forth the propriety of this mode of punishment in a very conspicuous light.

If they worshiped the *heavens*, and paid adoration to *lights* and *meteors*; how fully must they, and the nations around them, be taught and convinced by this act, that God ruleth in the heavens above, as well as on the earth beneath; and that he can, when he pleases, make “ wind and storm, thunder and lightning,” the ministers of his vengeance on a sinful people?

If the fertility of their country, and the plenty it produced, contributed to excite and inflame their passions; and also to support them in their profligate indulgences; how wisely was it ordained—as a lasting memorial of God’s displeasure against all rioting,
luxury,

luxury, and intemperance—that the whole region should be burnt up, and rendered for the future utterly sterile? And how aptly were the nations thence instructed, that it was the firm and settled purpose of Providence, whenever his bounties came to be abused, to “make a fruitful land desolate and barren, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein?”

And since the people were all devoted to destruction; in how speedy a manner, and with what frugal display of extraordinary power, was it brought upon them, by adjusting the means, as here described, to the nature and constitution of the soil? For that region, abounding with *bitumen*, was no sooner struck by the lightning, than it kindled into a flame; and suffocated the inhabitants by its noxious exhalations. Then the fire, running along the veins of this inflammable matter into the caverns below, rarified the air, and produced a violent earthquake; whereby the cities were instantly overturned: and the ground, at the same

Ps. vii. 34.

time,

time, sinking down, formed a deep and extensive cavity; which, being soon filled by the influx of waters, became a sea; “and covered all the plain.” So quickly and compendiously was the desolation completed—which sufficiently accounts for this mode of proceeding.

But the propriety of it will still farther appear from the uses that were intended to be served by it.

And it was one intention of this signal *catastrophe*, to impress upon the nations (what they much wanted to have impressed upon them) a full conviction of God’s immediate and constant inspection into the affairs and concerns of mankind*—a full conviction of his not contenting himself with governing the world by what we call a general providence, and the established order of things; but of his actually interposing in a most exact and particular manner to punish some particular, enormous sins: to impress upon them a full conviction, that, however patient and

* Vide Targ. in Gen. xix. 24. Non fecerunt poenitentiam, quoniam dixerunt, non manifesta sunt coram Domino opera mala.
forbearing

forbearing he might be for a time; yet, when the iniquities of men were come to the full, he would finally appear as terrible in his judgments, as they were vile and abominable in their doings. And that such a conviction was accordingly made and impressed upon them, is evident from the case of Abimelech; who, having ignorantly taken another man's wife, and being consequently in danger of committing a crime, which bore some affinity to the sins of Sodom, was afterwards mightily concerned for his land, lest God should destroy it in a similar manner^t.

Hence then we are led to the consideration of another end, that was proposed to be answered by this *catastrophe*. It served as a caution to the several nations, not to indulge the same crimes, for fear they should fall under the same punishment. And it is accordingly held up continually to their view, in the sacred writings, by way of check and terrour. Thus the prophets, in their addresses to Babylon, Jerusalem, and other

^t Gen. xx. 7, 8, 9.

profane and impious cities, often remind them of this event; and as often threaten them, that, if they did not forsake the error of their ways, they should be so punished and fearfully overthrown, “as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.” Thus also the Psalmist, dissuading the ungodly from their perverse doings, plainly refers them to this miraculous infliction, both as a proof and example of that divine vengeance, which awaits notorious and impenitent sinners. However secure they may think themselves, yet justice will certainly overtake them; and “they shall finally receive the due reward of their deeds.” For “upon the wicked,” says he, “God will rain snares,” or quick burning coals, “fire and brimstone, storm and tempest. This shall be their portion to drink *.”

Now as this event was so admirably calculated to check the career of unthinking sinners, and engage their attention to their

* Deut. xxix. 22--24. Is. xiii. 19. Jer. xxiii. 14—xlix. 18.—
l. 40. Ez. xxxviii. 22. Amos iv. 11. Zeph. ii. 9.

* Ps. xi. 6.

most important concerns; how wisely was it provided, that the memory of it should be conveyed to posterity, not only by the less affecting representation of history, but also by the more amazing visible conflagrations of perpetually living fire? For that this region continued to burn for ages, we find attested by several authors of great and undoubted credit.

To pass by the author of the book of Wisdom^y, Diodorus Siculus, who lived in the reign of Julius Cæsar, describing the Asphaltite lake, which now occupies all that space where these ruined cities formerly stood, tells us, “that the country about it was *then* on fire; and sent forth a grievous smell; to which he attributes the sickly constitution and short lives of the neighbouring inhabitants^z.”

Strabo, who flourished soon after, mentions likewise the sea of Sodom by the mistaken name of *lacus Serbonis*; and “speaks of it as bubbling and emitting *smoke* at the

^y See ch. x. 6--9.

^z Bib. Hist. lib. xix.

time he wrote—" and moreover adds, that "the broken and burnt rocks, ruins of buildings, and cineritious earth, which are seen all about it, give credit to the testimony of the people of the country, who say, that Sodom and the other cities, which anciently stood in this place, were destroyed by earthquake and fire ^a."

Tacitus gives nearly the same account; and asserts, that "the traces of the fire were still visible in the burnt earth ^b."

From these testimonies it evidently appears, and still more particularly from the testimony of Philo^c, that this fire lasted, without intermission, till after the days of the Apostles. And if so, we may easily account for the phraseology of the text; where St. Jude observes of Sodom and Gomorrah, that "they are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of ETERNAL fire ^d."

^a Geograph. lib. x.

^b Histor. lib. v.

^c Vit. Mos. lib. ii. sub finem.

^d Ver. 7.

For a fire, which was actually burning at the time he wrote; and had continued to burn for near two thousand years together^e, sufficiently justifies the Apostle's language in applying to it *that* epithet.—It justifies also the application and sentiment of another Apostle, in making it the emblem of that *everlasting* punishment, which is reserved for the wicked in another life. For thus St. John, in plain allusion to the subject before us, describes the future state of the ungodly, and the misery they are to suffer in the other world—"Their part shall be in the *lake*, which burneth with fire and brimstone^f.—And the *smoke* of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever^g."

Nor was this emblematical use of it, as a representation of God's eternal ven-

^e Yea and is probably burning *now*. For BROCHARD, who visited this lake in the twelfth century, saw it then "flaming and smoking like the mouth of hell." Descrip. Ter. Sanctæ, p. 1. cap. viii. § 35. And later travellers have observed something of the like appearance, in proportion to the quantity of the floating bitumen.

^f Rev. xxi. 8.

^g Ibid. xiv. 11.

geance, on the impieties of mankind, confined to the limits of divine revelation: It was so apt, pertinent, and striking, that it gained admittance into the heathen mythology. For the poetic rivers of hell, the *black Cocytus*, and the *burning Phlegethon*, seem to be only, if I may so speak, streams derived from the *Dead sea*. But nevertheless, since these fabled rivers, as well as the sea to which they refer, served to work on the apprehensions of men, and thereby to restrain them from vicious practices; they so far answered the intention of Providence, and conspired with his other dispensations to the general improvement and happiness of the world.

The practical conclusions, which result from the whole, and which justly merit our regard, are these.

That “the Lord alloweth or approveth the righteous; but the ungodly, and him that delighteth in wickedness, doth his soul abhor^b.”

^b Psal. xi. 6. old version.

That though “he is merciful and long-suffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentanceⁱ,” yet, if men will perversely continue in sin, and abuse the means of salvation; “his wrath” will certainly burst out, and fall heavily at last “on those children of vice and disobedience^k.” And therefore,

That it is no less our interest, than it is our duty, to consider these things in time; and make all the haste we possibly can, to secure, by a course of virtue, both our present peace, and our future felicity.

And when once we are engaged in this course, let us “remember Lot’s wife^l,” and take heed, that we neither “turn again,” nor “look back” to the things we have left behind us. For she stands, not only as a woful instance of the wondrous manner, in which the wicked inha-

ⁱ 2 Pet. iii. 9.

^k Ephes. v. 6.

^l Luke xvii. 32. Gen. xix, 26.

bitants of that country perished; but also as a lasting example to others, of the great folly of delay and remissness in their obedience to the commands of God.

Now to God the Father, &c.

S E R M O N X.

PSALM lxxviii. 12.

Marvellous things did he in the sight of their fathers in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan.

WE have seen the Israelites marvelously conducted into the land of Egypt, and providentially settled in the district of Goshen; where, though they lived distinct by themselves, they had yet many and frequent opportunities of imparting something of the true religion to all the people around them.

Here they continued above two hundred years; during which time, great and momentous revolutions happened, as well in the general state of the kingdom, as in their own particular affairs.

In the first period of their settlement; whilst they comfortably enjoyed the benign influence of royal favour; as they were gratefully disposed to instruct those, with whom they conversed, in the true knowledge of God and his providence; so their correspondents, we may presume, were no less inclined to be taught and instructed by them. From these mutually good dispositions, from these kind intercourses and friendly correspondence, great improvements must necessarily arise. For religion and virtue, strongly inculcated on one side, and readily embraced on the other, must naturally thrive and increase: And, as they spread, must naturally and of course gather strength.

But whatever improvements the Egyptians might make in their religious sentiments or moral conduct, during this calm and auspicious period; yet, certain it is, that
in

in subsequent, and probably turbulent, times, when a new and impious king had acquired the dominion over them, they gradually relapsed into their former state of vice and ignorance; and became again unhappily distinguished by their gross superstitions and abominable idolatries. For it is incontestably evident, that in the days of Moses they were entirely devoted to the worship and service of false deities: And not only so, but that the Israelites themselves, who sojourned among them, were in like manner, notwithstanding the promises and seal of circumcision, either led by their example, or forced by their cruelty, to adopt and practise the same superstitions^m.

When things were come to such a pass; when this people, who had been raised up on purpose to preserve religion, were thus in danger of being perverted from it, or of perishing under the afflictions which they suffered on its account; when this, I say, appears to be the case; was it not highly

^m Exod. xxxii. 1—9. Josh. xxiv. 14. Ezek. xx. 7, 8.—xxiii. 3. See Bp. WARBURTON'S Div. Leg. b. iv. § 6.

necessary

necessary that God should visibly interpose in their favour, and deliver them from the hands of their cruel, oppressive, and infectious masters? And considering the part, which the Israelites had to act, in carrying on the designs of his providence; was it not equally necessary, that the mode of their deliverance should be so contrived, as to convince them and the rest of the world, that the notions they had imbibed were vain and erroneous, and the gods they adored false and imaginary?

Now, as these things were not only worthy of the divine cognizance in themselves, but seem, in their very nature, to require some proper provision to be made for them; so it is observable, that God, through the course of his manifestations in Egypt, had a clear and constant regard to themⁿ. For the chief intention, as the Scripture as-

ⁿ Cum id ageret Deus, ut populum ab Ægypti servitute liberaret; ita parata sunt omnia, ut Deus Israelis Ægypti deos ludibrio exponeret, eosque, una cum cultu eorum, vanitatis post natos homines maxime redargueret. SPENCER de Leg. Heb. lib. I. c. i. § 1.

fures us, of his “multiplying those signs and wonders, both in heaven above, and in the earth beneath,” was to convince all—the Israelites^o, Egyptians^p, and the rest of the nations^q—that “the heavens and the earth were the Lord’s, and that he was the governor among all people^r ;” or, in other words, that “he alone was the true God, and that there was none else besides him.”—How properly these manifestations were adapted to produce such convictions, I shall now endeavour to explain.

It is the fundamental principle of divine government, to work upon rational creatures in a rational manner. But the most rational method of reclaiming any people from the errors they have imbibed, and of bringing them over to the opposite truths, is, to make it plain to their understanding, that things are in fact just the reverse of what they conceive ; and to render them sensible,

^o Exod. vi. 7.—x. 2.

^p Exod. vii. 5.—xiv. 4. 18.

^q Exod. ix. 16.

^r Psal. xxii. 28.

that

that it were therefore more becoming their nature, as well as more conducive to their happiness, to think and act differently for the future.

Now, let us apply this to the case before us.

Mankind were never so depraved in their notions of the divinity, but they attributed to it as well the government and conduct of things, as the distribution of the good or ill that befel them: And so far they were certainly right. But then they falsely imagined, that the more illustrious and active parts of the universe—the sun, stars, and elements—completely answered these divine characters. For, as they observed the course of things to be constantly regulated, and the blessings and calamities of life to be daily dispensed, by the motion and agency of these bodies; so they were led, by those appearances, to believe them to be the only gods that governed the world. Herein lay their ruinous mistake. And by what means was this mistake to be corrected? Was it not by convincing them, that these bodies had no other powers

powers or qualities, than what they derived from their great Creator ; whose instruments they were in carrying on the purposes of his providence ? And what properer method could Jehovah employ to form in their minds this conviction, than that of empowering his minister to change or suppress the qualities of such bodies ; and make them operate, by his bare command, in direct opposition to their ordinary course ?

This was to appeal to their own notions ; to make them sensible in their own way, that he alone was the governour of the world ; and that all visible beings were but so many subordinate agents, working by his power, and under his direction ; and consequently, that he alone was intitled to the worship and obedience of men, as he alone could reward or punish them.

Now, as such a process was most aptly accommodated, in the reason of things, to the circumstances and apprehensions of mankind ; so, in the case of the Egyptians, the Deity, we find, proceeded accordingly—exerting his power in appropriated instances,

which equally served to demonstrate the nullity of the gods they worshiped, as to punish the crimes they had been guilty of in consequence of that worship.

But, to set this matter in a clear light, it will be necessary to take a particular view of the progress and conduct of the whole procedure.

In the first place then, Jehovah, by a message in his own name, required the Egyptians to release his people^s. The Egyptians disclaimed all knowledge of him, and arrogantly disdained to pay any regard or attention to him. “Who is Jehovah,” replied Pharaoh, “that I should obey his voice, to let Israel go? I know not Jehovah, neither will I let Israel go^t.” They had gods of their own—*universal nature* and its several *parts*^u—who could, they thought, act as power-

^s Exod. v. 1.

^t Ibid. ver. 2.

^u They worshiped the *universe* under the name, i. of Pan. Παρ’ Αἰγυπτίοισι δὲ, ΠΑΝ μὲν, ἀρχαῖότατον καὶ τῶν ὅλων τῶν πρώτων λεγόμενον Θεῶν εἶναι. HEROD. Euterp. c. cxlv. And of him it is sung, — Πᾶν

powerfully in their behalf, as Jehovah could do in behalf of the Israelites. In these therefore they trusted, and upon these they depended.

This then, you see, was the proper time to convince them of their folly; or to punish their stubbornness, if they proved incorrigible. But God, foreknowing what the consequence would be, and unwilling to enter on the methods of severity, commanded his servants to go again to Pharaoh, and repeat the demand of his dismissing the Israelites. Upon this second application, the king required them to exhibit some miracle, as a

Πᾶσα καὶ τὴν κτίσιν—κόσμοιο τὸ σύμπαν,
Οὐρανὸν, ἡδὲ θάλασσαν, ἰδὲ χθόνα παρδασίλειαν,
Καὶ πῦρ ἀθάνατον· τάδε γὰρ μέλη ἐστὶ τὰ Παιάς.

ORPH. Hym. in Pan.

2. under that of Serapis; Nam Serapis, quem Ægyptii deum maximum prodide erunt, oratus a Nicocreonte Cypriorum rege quis deorum haberetur, his versibus sollicitam religionem regis intruxit—

Εἰμὶ θεὸς τοιούσδε μαθεῖν, εἶον κ' ἐγὼ εἶπω·
Οὐρανὸν· κόσμον· κεφαλὴν, γαστήρ δὲ θάλασσα,
Γαῖα δὲ μοι πόδες εἰσὶ, τὰ δ' ἔατ' ἐν αἰθέρι κεῖται,
Ορμὰς τε τηλαυγὲς λαμπρὸν φάος ἡλίοιο.

MACROB. Saturn. Lib. I. c. xx.

proof

proof that Jehovah was really God, and that they were charged with his commission. Aaron, in compliance with that request, “threw down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent^x—” which in their *hieroglyphical* theology, was the emblem or representation of the *supreme* God^y.” Hereupon the magicians were called to confront him; who, being arrived, instantly “threw down every man his rod, which became in like manner serpents—” emblems or symbols of their supreme divinities. Thus far both parties might be thought, perhaps, to have exhibited equal signs of power. But the superiority soon appears: for “Aaron’s rod swallowed up all the rods of the magicians^z.” An evident prognostic this, of the event of the ensuing contest; wherein Jehovah vanquished and

^x Exod. vii. 10.

^y Οἱ Ἀγύπτιοι—τὰ δὲ ΟΦΙΝ, ἀγαθὸν Δαίμονα σημαίνοντες, i. e. Ægyptii Serpente bonum Dæmonem significant. SANCHONATH. apud EUSEB. Præp. Ev. Lib. I. c. x. p. 41. &c. Voss. de Idololatr. lib. III. cap. 13, in fine.

^z Exod. viii. 12.

destroyed

destroyed all the gods of Egypt in reality, as he did here in symbols.

This miracle making no impression on the minds of Pharaoh and his ministers; God then proceeded to exert his power in still more awakening miracles—such as not only proved, that he was “God of gods, and Lord of lords,” but also shewed, that “his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him^a.”

These miracles, though seemingly confused to superficial readers, may nevertheless, upon closer inspection, be easily reduced into *four classes*; as being transacted in the *four elements*, which were esteemed in Egypt the four principal deities:

Let us then consider them in their order: for there is plainly a regular order, and a just gradation, observable in them.

I. The Egyptians, it is well known, held WATER^b in high veneration; and more par-

^a Ezra viii. 22.

^b Ægypti incolæ aquarum beneficia percipientes, aquam colunt, aquas superstitiosa votorum continuatione venerantur. JUL. FIRMIC: de Er. prof. Religionis. PIRL. Jud. de vīta Mosis, lib. i. p. 617.

ticularly the river Nile^c. This was the fruitful source of their choicest blessings; and thence became the chief object of their religious regard. For, as their daily sustenance was, in a great measure, owing to its bounty—its water being their common drink, and its fish their common food^d; so were they punctually careful in paying it their constant and daily devotions. If then they were to be convinced, that “God is wonderful in the waters;” that *that* river in particular was his^e; and that they ought to be thankful to him for it; surely his depriving it of all its utility—destroying its fish that they might not eat them, altering its

^c Οὐδὲν γὰρ ἔτω τιμὴ Αἰγυπτίους ὡς ὁ Νεῖλος. Nihil enim apud Ægyptios tanto in honore erat atque Nilus. PLUT. de Is. et Osir. § 5.

^d Numbers xi. 5. HERODOT. Eut. c. lxxvii. DIOD. Sic. Bib. Hist. lib. I. p. 32. Ed. Hanov.

^e The present king of Egypt might perhaps imagine, with the same arrogance as one of his successors afterwards did—See Ezek. xxix. 3.—that this river was so peculiarly and emphatically his *own*, that it was not in the power of any God to dispossess or deprive him of its benefits.

water that they could not drink it^f—was no unlikely means to work that effect.—And if they were, which they are said to have been, so barbarously superstitious in their devotions to this river, as, at a particular period in every year, to stain its current with human sacrifices^g; then his “turning its water into blood” was a just and suitable punishment for such bloody cruelties^h.

Then again, as the banks of this river were the grand scene of their magical operationsⁱ, in which blood and *frogs* made the principal part of the apparatus^k; so, by commanding it to produce such an infinite

^f PHILLO (vit. Moſis, lib. i. p. 617. Ed. Paris.) ſeems to intimate, that the fiſh became immediately unfit for uſe; their nutritive property being inſtantly changed into another of the moſt peſtiferous nature. And JOSEPHUS ſays (Antiq. Jud. lib. ii. c. xiv. § 1.) that the water brought great pains and bitter torments upon thoſe who ventured to drink of it.

^g Universal Hiſt. vol. I. b. I. ch. iii. § 1. p. 413 and 484. 8vo.

^h Ex. vii. 19. 21. Rev. xvi. 5. 6.

ⁱ Targ. Jon. B. UZIEL, in Exod. vii. 15. et viii. 16.

^k MAIMON, Mor. Nevoch. p. iii. c. xlvi. SPENCER de Leg. Heb. lib. ii. c. xv. § 1. HORAT. Epod. v. ver. 19. JUVENAL. Sat. iii. ver. 44.

multitude of these creatures to annoy them^l, he adapted his chastisement to the nature of their crimes: adapted it indeed in a most wonderful manner: since frogs were not only the instruments of their abominations, but likewise the emblems of those impure dæmons, whom they invoked by their incantations^m.

II. The EARTH was another object of their worshipⁿ; to which they addressed their solemn devotions, and offered up the first fruits of the harvest, as to the donor of their corn and grain, and of all the other produce of the year^o. To make them therefore sen-

^l Exod. viii. 5. 6.

^m Rev. xvi. 13.

ⁿ Non eosdem deos similiter colunt universi Ægyptii, πλὴν Ἰσιός τε, καὶ Ὀσίριος, præter *Isidem* et *Osirin*—hos peræque universi colunt. HERODOT. Euterp. c. 42. Ἰσιδος σῶμα τὴν ἔχουσι καὶ ιουάζουσιν. PLUT. de Is. et Os. § 38.

^o Ἐτι γὰρ καὶ νῦν κατὰ τὸν θερισμὸν τὰς πρώτας ἀμνηθύντας εἰσάχουσιν, κ. τ. λ. Nam etiam nunc messis tempore oblatis spicarum primitiis, incolæ juxta manipulos plangere, Isidemque invocare solent. Id quod idcirco faciunt, ut honorem pro inventis Deæ sub primæ inventionis tempus retribuunt. DIOD. SICUL. Bib. Hist. lib. i. p. 13. EUSEB. Præp. Evang. lib. iii. cap. vi. sub fin. SPENCER de Leg. Heb. lib. iii. cap. xi.

sible, that the EARTH did not put forth those life-sustaining productions (for which they adored it with mistaken gratitude) by any independent virtue of its own, but only in consequence of the divine establishment; to make them, I say, sensible of this, God reversed the nature of its productions; causing it to “bring forth *lice* on man and beast, through all the land of Egypt.” Before, they were nourished by what the earth produced; now, they are devoured by it.

“And because they had gone astray so very far in the ways of error, as to hold the cattle of the field—yea, noisome beasts, reptiles, and insects—for gods^a ;” therefore the former were killed by a murrain^r ; and a mixture of the latter was sent to torment them^s : “that they might experimentally know,

^r Exod. viii. 16, 17.

^a Wisd. xi. 15.

^r Exod. ix. 3—6.

^s Exod. viii. 21—24. *Heb.* בָּעֲרָבִים, which the *Vulg.* renders, omne genus muscarum; but the *LXX* more particularly, *κυσέμειζον*,

know, that wherewithal a man sinneth, by the same also shall he be punished ^t.”

III. The AIR was another of their chief divinities ^u; to whom they attributed the salubrity of their climate, and the healthiness of their own constitutions ^x; and whose benevolence therefore they studied to engage by the offerings of daily incense ^y. To convince them of the fallhood of this opinion; to shew them, that “God alone woundeth and healeth, killeth and maketh alive;” he changed the salubrious qualities of the air, and rendered it pestilential—“exciting hot, inflamed tumors, and virulent, angry ulcers, both in man and beast, throughout all the

i. e. *dog-fly*. And in this sense, the infliction is justly applicable to a particular branch of their superstition, viz. *dog-worship*. *Oppida tota canem venerantur.* Juv. Sat. xv. ver. 8.

^t Wisd. xi. 16.

^u Τὸν δ' Αἶρα προσελογίζεσθαι φασὶν Ἀθηναῖον, κ. τ. λ. Aëri porro Minervæ nomen, quadam vocis interpretatione, attribuisse, Jovisque filiam hanc et virginem putari, eo quod aer natura corruptioni non sit obnoxius. DIODOR. SICUL. Bib. Hist. lib. i. p. 12. EUSEB. Præp. Evang. lib. III. cap. ii.

^x HERODOT. Eut. c. lxxvii.

^y PLUTARCH. de Is. et Os. § 80.

land.”

stand.”—And if you suppose this painful infliction to affect more particularly the inguinal parts, as the word which we translate “blains²” seems to indicate; we may then conclude it to be farther intended as a just punishment of those lascivious practices, and abominable impurities, to which the nation was horribly addicted³.

Then again; as they ascribed the exuberance, growth, and maturity of all vegetable productions to the genial warmth and benign influence of this divinity, the AIR; so the Lord strengthened and invigorated the powers of that element⁴ to correct and reprove their error. For he caused it to produce such

² Exod. ix. 9. Heb. אֲבַעְבֵּעוֹת ulcera, apostemata, morbus gallicus. SCHINDLER in Rad. אֲבַעַ. Sic. et Arab. in signif. 7. Scortata fuit mulier.

³ Haud dubie *fornicandi* verbum, ut passim, ad idololatriam refertur. Ita tamen, ut simul alludat ad *Ægyptiorum* libidines impurissimas. Horresco referens. In parte hircini cultus id fuit, quod quædam mulieres, tanquam religioni addictæ, sacris scilicet hircis fæde se submittebant. BOCHART. Hieroz. p. I. lib. ii. c. liii. See Levit. xviii. 23, 24.—xx. 15, 16. and PATRICK’S Com. on the Text.

⁴ Wisd. xvi. 24.

dreadful storms of rain, hail, thunder, and lightning, as had never been known since the foundation of Egypt; whereby the greatest part of the herbage and fruit was blasted and destroyed.—And afterwards, the *east-wind*, which they likewise adored, conveyed through their coasts a large flight of locusts, to eat and consume the remainder^c.

IV. The supreme objects of their worship were the SUN, MOON, and STARS^d, whose splendor struck them with high admiration, and whose beneficence worked mightily upon their gratitude. To shew them therefore that he ruled in the heavens, and governed these exalted and splendid luminaries; Jehovah suspended their lights and emanations—caused them to withdraw their

^c Exod. x. 12—15.

^d Τῆς δ' ἐν κατ' Ἀγυπτιον ἀρχαίας τοῦ παλαιῶν γαιόμενης—ὅπολα εἶναι δύο θεοί, αὐτοὶ τε καὶ πρῶτοι, τότε ἥλιον καὶ τὴν Σελήνην, κ. τ. λ. Cæterum vetustissimos in Ægypto mortales—duos esse Deos existimasse, æternos & primos, Solem quippe & Lunam; quorum istum Osirim, hanc Isim, appellarint. DIODOR. SICUL. Bibl. Hist. lib. I. p. 10. PORPHYR. apud EUSEB. Præp. Evang. lib. iii. cap. iv.

lustre—and “covered all the land of Egypt with thick darkness for three days^e.”

To these miracles in proof of his sovereignty, God superadded one more, as a demonstration of his providence. For the death of every first-born of the Egyptians carried so lively a resemblance, and bore, as the author of the Book of Wisdom justly observes^f, so natural a relation to their sin, in destroying every male of the Israelites; that they must needs perceive, it was purposely inflicted as a suitable punishment for that very cruelty: and consequently must conclude, that this great and tremendous God, the God of Israel, took particular cognizance of human transactions; and, sooner or later, “rewarded every man according to his work.”

Such were the miracles performed in Egypt; and such the purposes intended by them. And, when viewed in this light; the very light in which the Scripture places

^e Exod. x. 21---23.

^f Ch. xviii. 5.

them;

them ; how judiciously do they appear to be accommodated in their *nature* to the apprehensions of the people, and the points in controversy ! how properly adapted, in every respect, to answer the ends, that were designed by them ! Nor is the *manner* in which they were wrought less worthy of our admiration ; since it was so calculated, as to exclude or obviate every objection, which their prejudices might suggest ; and to forward and improve every good and pious emotion, which their reflections might inspire. For,

In the first place, as the Egyptians, who had very high notions of the art of forcery, might probably imagine, that Moses performed these miracles and prodigies by some fascination^s ; so their own magicians were freely permitted to try the utmost of their skill and power in the repetition or imitation of them : but they tried in vain. Their acknowledged inability therefore to equal

^s ORIGEN contra CELSUM, lib. iii. PHILO Jud. De vita Moïsis lib. i.

and

and imitate them, plainly proved and incontestably evinced, that they were not the effects of magic, but the works of God^b. And, though these detestable seducers had so far imposed upon the people, as to make them believe, that they could, by their incantations, secure both their persons and properties from all kinds of evilⁱ; yet, how must even the simplest among them, be now awakened into a full conviction of the falshood and vanity of such deceits, when they saw the magicians, with all their boasting, equally involved in the common calamities; and, in spite of the high pretensions of their art, sharing the general fate of their neighbours^k! And this, it should seem, the historian has been careful to record, lest the children of Israel should be led astray, and imposed upon by the like pretensions.

Moreover, the Egyptians were forewarned of the day, when every plague should befall

^b Exod. viii. 19.

ⁱ MAIMON. Mor. Nevoch. p. iii. c. xxxvii,

^k Wild. xvii. 7. 8.

them ;

them; and permitted to assign their own time, when they would have them removed; whereby they might clearly see, that God alone was the author both of their sufferings and deliverances; and that no planetary aspect (for they thought the stars governed the world) was so favourable or malign, but that he could afflict or relieve them, when ever he pleased.

Besides, these miraculous judgments came upon them by leisurely advances; and proper intervals of respite were allowed them, to consider and reflect upon what had been done;—"that, seeing by their punishment wherein they had offended, they might return from their wickedness, and believe on the Lord¹."

And lastly, to convince them that the God, who wrought these wonders among them, was the God of Israel; he made an obvious, visible distinction, through the course of his procedure, between the two nations: and whilst the land of Egypt was

¹ Wisd. xii. 2.

afflicted with these plagues, the land of Goshen, where the Israelites dwelt, remained free and unmolested^m. From whence they might draw this farther conclusion, that he was as truly gracious to the faithful and obedient, as he was terribly severe on the rebellious and ungodly.

Now, if these rational methods of conviction could not prevail on the obstinate Egyptians to repent of their wickedness, and let Israel go; what else can reasonably be expected, but that God, in justice, should suffer their crime to become their punishment; and leave them “to eat the bitter fruit of their own ways, and to be filled with their own devicesⁿ?” Accordingly, when they pursued the Israelites, with infatuated resolution, into the midst of the sea; God, who was in no wise bound to preserve his enemies by a miracle, suffered the sea to return to its strength—and overwhelm them all^o.

^m Ex. viii. 22.—ix. 4. 26.—x. 23.—xii. 13.

ⁿ Prov. i. 31.

^o Ex. xiv. 27, 28.

“ Thus

“ Thus the Lord got him honour upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen—and likewise upon his gods^p;” whom, according to the custom of those ancient times, it is probable, he carried in the front of his army^q.

I need not observe what awful impressions this amazing judgment^r must fix on the minds of the several nations, to whom it became known; and how forcibly it must convince them, that the God, who could do such mighty wonders, must be “ greater than all gods: since, in the place and things, wherein they were sup-

^p Ex. xiv. 18. Numb. xxxiii. 4.

^q Familiare fuit idololatriis antiquioribus, iter præsertim suscepturis, aut cum hoste congressuris, idola parvula secum ferre: ut itineris socios, pugnaeque duces atque auspices haberent deos tutelares, iisque præsentibus cultum exhiberent. SPENCER. de Leg. Heb. Lib. iii. c. iii. § 1. Of this custom we meet with several instances in Scripture; and with one even so low as the days of David. 1 Chron. xiv. 12.

^r And perhaps the more awful, because of the *manner* in which it was accomplished. For the ancients accounted *drowning* a dreadful and accursed death. Δεινὸν δ' ἐστὶ θάνατον μετὰ κίμασιν. HESIOD. Op. et Dies. lib. ii. ver. 305.

posed to have most power, he was now found to be above them^s."

But I must not, however, forget to mention, that this remarkable punishment, severe as it was on Pharaoh and his army, might yet be inflicted in great goodness, and be ultimately attended with great benefits, respecting the nation at large. For, if the various modes of idolatry, then practised in Egypt, were, as there is some reason to suspect, imposed upon the people by the *priests*, and supported by the *soldiery*; then, the total destruction of these oppressive agents of wickedness happily served—to set the people at full liberty to judge for themselves; and to follow the impulse of those reflections, which the preceding miracles had excited in their minds. But those reflections would naturally lead them, to consider Jehovah, the author of these miracles, as the only great and true God—and consequently, as the sole Being, to whom their veneration was to be now directed. Hence their religion must neces-

^s Ex. xviii. 11.

farily assume a new form ; and become, of course, more pure, perfect, and refined, than it was before. Being reformed themselves, they communicated their improvements to other nations: for most nations learnt of them—imbibed their sentiments; and copied their manners.

Now, if the case was really such; if the greatest part of the world derived their policy and religion from the Egyptians; then the reformation of the inhabitants of Egypt might eventually become the reformation of the inhabitants of the greatest part of the globe.—A circumstance, which converts the severity of this punishment, into an instance of benevolence of the most extensive kind.

“ O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” *Amen.*

¹ Rom. xi. 33.

S E R M O N XI.

DEUT. xxxii. 9, 10.

The Lord's portion is his people, Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.

He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him; he kept him as the apple of his eye.

THOUGH the children of Israel, in consequence of the miracles they had seen in Egypt, and of the wonderful passage that was opened for them through the Red-Sea, did now believe and gratefully^u acknow-

^u Exod. xiv. 31. Psal. cvi. 12.

ledge, that their great deliverer was the true God; and that he alone had a right to their obedience; yet, as their superstitious prejudices were deeply rooted, and their proneness to idolatry remained strong, the utmost precaution was still necessary to keep them from falling off. They were too weak and unsettled to be left to themselves, to contend with occurring temptations. For had they been allowed to converse familiarly with the neighbouring nations, or had they been conducted immediately into the land of Canaan, the very sight of the customary heathen worship would have rekindled their fondness for it; and its fascinating ceremonies would have seduced them again, to adopt and continue the practice of it.

To guard them therefore from the pernicious contagion of ill examples; and to keep them in constant dependance upon himself; God wisely carried them into a desolate wilderness: where they saw such continued, marvellous, instances of his power and goodness, as equally served to supply their continually-rising wants, and to strengthen and confirm

confirm their yet feeble, and wavering faith. For *there* their necessities were not more various, urgent, and pressing; than his merciful providence was instant; forward; and ready to relieve them: adapting itself to the circumstances of their condition, and adjusting its operations to the nature of their wants.

As they knew not the way through that pathless desert; and were in danger of being devoured by wild beasts; the *shechinah*, the symbol of the divine presence, went constantly before them, to guide and protect them in all their journies. “He spread out a cloud for a covering in the day-time; and fire to give light in the night-season*.”

When they grew thirsty; and had nothing to drink; “he brought waters out of the stony rock, and gave them drink thereof as if it had been out of the great depth.”

When they were oppressed with hunger; and had nothing to eat; “he sent them

* Ps. cv. 39.

† Ps. lxxviii. 15, 16. Ex. xvii. 6. Numb. xx. 8—11.

flesh in abundance, and filled them with the bread of heaven².”

As they were continually exposed to the inclemencies of the weather, without any means of supplying themselves with new cloathing; therefore, that they might not perish by cold and nakedness, he preserved their garments fresh and entire, through all the time of their migration in the wilderness³.

And, lastly, to render them equal to the difficulties of their marches, he kept their feet from swelling, and their shoes from wearing out⁴.

The paternal care, displayed in these miracles, must, one would imagine, effectually engage their gratitude to God, “who had done such great things for them;” and invariably fix them in a dutiful obedience to all his laws: laws, that were, most of them, attended at their delivery with an amazing

² Ps. cv. 40. Ex. xvi. 12—15. Numb. xi. 7, 31.

³ Deut. xxix. 5.

⁴ Deut. viii. 4.

train of wonders—equally calculated to prove their divinity, as to secure them respect and attention : laws, that were, all of them, excellently adapted, as well to promote the great design of this people's separation, as to prevent the irregularities, which they were liable to fall into, from the seducing examples of other nations.

But alas! so strangely was this perverse generation attached to the customs, follies and superstitions of the people they had left, that no miracles could engage them, no laws could preserve them, in the allegiance they owed to God. For, even in defiance of the Ten Commandments which were just delivered; and while Sinai was yet trembling at the majestic and awful presence of the Almighty ; this people had the hardness to revolt from him—to make for themselves a molten image,—a golden calf, the very Egyptian Apis^c—under the conduct and protec-

^c Ὁ μόσχος ἦτορ, ὃ Ἀπὶς καλεῖται. HERODOT. lib. iii. c. 28. Vide et SUIDAM in voce Ἀπιδίς; which affords an excellent Comment on Exod. xxxii. 1—10.

tion of which they meant to return to their beloved Egypt.

This defection was foul and daring : and as it deserved, so it accordingly received, a just and suitable punishment. “ For there fell of the people that day about three thousand men^d.” But, notwithstanding this and other chastisements, which plainly shewed them the extreme folly of deserting their God ; yet could not their hearts be in any wise induced to rely wholly upon him ; nor could any motives prevail with them to “ continue stedfast in his covenant^e.” They revolted from him at every turn ; and murmured against him in every distress : which only served to increase their calamities, as it provoked his farther resentment.

When they perceived at length, that their rebellions against him served only to multiply the proofs of his supremacy, and to bring upon themselves heavier inflictions ; their perverseness took then another turn ;

^d Ex. xxxii. 28.

^e Psal. lxxviii. 37.

and

and vented itself in opposition to his *ministers*. They disputed both the title of Moses to the *civil* power, and the designation of Aaron to the *priesthood*^f.

Now this opposition was no less impious than arrogant. For it struck directly at the very basis of the divine establishment; and was, in effect, an open declaration, that the Mosaic æconomy was nothing more, than a refined stroke of state policy—the artful contrivance of their ambitious leader.

At the head of this opposition appeared two renowned and powerful parties; who, respectively, objected to the two brothers, Moses and Aaron, on account of the offices, which they had respectively assumed. For Dathan and Abiram, who were the descendants of Reuben, the first-born of Jacob, thought themselves, in right of primogeniture, better entitled to the *civil* authority, than Moses could possibly be. And Korah and his adherents, being all, probably, of the tribe of Levi, claimed, in consequence,

^f Numb. xvi. 3.

an equal right with Aaron and his sons to the office of the *priesthood*.

These were points of high concern; and required a clear, incontestable decision. But who could decide them, save God himself? To him therefore the appeal was made. “And Moses said to all the assembly—Hereby ye shall know, that the Lord hath sent me to do all these things; and that I have not done them of mine own mind. If these men,” who question my commission, “die the common death of all men; or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the Lord hath not sent me: but if the Lord make a new thing,” and perform an instant, tremendous miracle; “if the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up alive; then ye shall understand, that these men have provoked the Lord^e,” in doubting my authority.

“And it came to pass, says the text, that, as he had made an end of speaking these words, the ground clave asunder that was

^e Numb. xvi. 28—30.

under them; and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, with all that appertained to them;—and then closed again upon them ^h.” A judgement, as decisive, as it was terrible.

Moses’s commission being thus proved, his brother’s cause was soon after determined. The trial was fair and open. Both parties appeared before the Lord, exercising the duty of the office they claimed. But the great Judge of both instantly declared his utter abhorrence of Korah’s presumption, by destroying him and his associates with fire ⁱ. And the next day he publicly ratified his approbation of Aaron, by accepting the atonement he made for the people, and stopping the plague that was raging among them ^k.

When God, by these tremendous acts, had clearly manifested his choice of Aaron, in preference to the sons of Levi; he was

^h Numb. xvi. 31—33.

ⁱ Ib. ver. 35.

^k Ib. ver. 48.

afterwards

afterwards pleased; in order to prevent any farther contest, to confirm the same by another miracle, to the exclusion of *all* the tribes. The form of the procedure was this; and is striking. He ordered them to take twelve *almond-rods*¹, according to the number of the twelve tribes; upon one of which the chief person of every tribe was to inscribe his name; and the name of Aaron to be written on the rod of Levi.

Now, if we suppose, as I think we may, that the *almond-tree* was used in ancient times for the emblem of favour, acceptance and propitiousness^m; then it will appear, that, by this designation, each rod became

¹ Numb. xvii. 1—5.

^m SERVUS, in his comment on the following lines of VIRGIL, Georg. i. 187, &c.

Contemplator item, cum se nux plurima sylvis,

Induit in forem, et ramos curvabit olentes;

Si superant fœtus, pariter frumenta sequentur, &c.

observes, Prognosticon est anni futuri fertilis, cum multis amygdala vestiet se floribus, &c. “that the quick budding, blossoming, &c. of the *almond* tree, were looked upon as a sure sign of a kind, plentiful and propitious year.” And therefore might easily be transferred to represent *favour, prosperity, or propitiousness at large,*

not only the symbol of a particular tribe, but also the emblem of the *priestly* office, in its highest and most important branch, the article of *atonement*. And if so, we have a clear view at once, as well of the propriety of this mode of proceeding; as of the justness of the conclusion, which immediately resulted from it. For if these rods, deposited in the tabernacle, remained there all together (that of Aaron alone excepted) in a *dry*, *dead* and *lifeless* state; was it not evident even to a demonstration, that the tribes represented by them were to remain *powerless* and *without authority*, in regard to the offices of that holy place? And when “the rod of Aaron *budded, blossomed, and yielded fruit,*” in so wonderful a manner, how plainly, though symbolically, it was thereby determined, that he and his descendants were the only persons, whom the Lord had called to minister before him; and that their ministration alone was the ministration of *truth, life and perfection*? And as *this rod* was afterwards laid up in the ark, for a perpetual testimony of the divine election of
the

the *Aaronic* raceⁿ; so were “the *censers* of Korah and his company wrought out into broad plates for a covering of the altar, as a standing memorial of the dreadful effect of their impious rebellion—that none, for the future, might presume to rebel in the same manner^o.”

And indeed, rebellions of this kind they were no longer guilty of; though in other respects they continued still incorrigibly vile, perverse and disobedient.

For, when God had carried them, with much patience and long-suffering, to the very borders of the promised land; and had mercifully proposed to put an end to their travels; forgetful of his mighty works, and actuated again by a spirit of perverseness, they contemptuously despised that pleasant land; and, concluding him unable to give them possession of it, murmured against him

ⁿ Numb. xvii. 10.

^o Numb. xvi. 38--40. When king Uzziah, many years after, impiously transgressed in the same way, he was instantly and miraculously smitten with the leprosy, and continued infected to the day of his death. 2 Chron. xxvi. 16--21.

with

with great bitterness, for exposing them to the dangers and calamities of war. “Wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword; that our wives and our children should be made a prey? Were it not better for us, to chuse a captain, and return again into Egypt?” And a captain they accordingly chose ^a.

This audacious revolt, proceeding from a spirit of hardened infidelity, provoked the Almighty to such a degree, that he determined to reject that whole generation, and force them to wander about in the wilderness, till they were all consumed and worn away. How they spent their time there, the prophets will readily inform us. “Have ye offered unto me,” saith God by the mouth of Amos, “sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness by the space of forty years, O house of Israel?” No: but, as he farther complains in the words of Ezekiel, “The house of Israel rebelled against me in the

^p Numb. xiv. 3, 4.

^a Nehem. ix. 17.

^r Ch. v. 25.

wilderness:

wilderness : they walked not in my statutes ; and they despised my judgements ; and my sabbaths they greatly polluted ; and their heart went after their idols^s.” And since they chose for themselves these vain gods, therefore the Lord “ consumed their days in correspondent vanity, and the years they had to live in extreme trouble^t.”

When this faithless generation was thus condemned to wander about, and die away, by degrees, in the wilderness ; the Lord, to give fuller scope to the sentence, withdrew from them, in some measure, that gracious protection which he had before vouchsafed ; and suffered them to perish, partly by the natural annoyances of the country ; such as the bite of venemous serpents^u, and other calamities incident to travellers in hot climates ; and partly by the incursions of adjacent enemies^x ; who easily overcame them, when now their God no longer succoured them.

^s Ch. xx. 13, 16.

^t Psal. lxxviii. 33.

^u Numb. xxi. 6.

^x Ibid. xiv. 45.

In this natural and ordinary way, which sufficiently answered the purpose of Providence, were numbers of them carried off—to the great abatement of ill examples. But whenever they “sinned with an high hand,” and were guilty of presumptuous transgressions; then did they always feel and experience the immediate rigour of divine vengeance, in a fearful and extraordinary manner. They were consumed by fire, or swept away by a plague. Of these inflictions we have several instances: but none more remarkable, than that which happened “in the matter of Peor;” when, for their heinous and complicated offence—their base idolatry and shameless fornication—“there fell of them in one day four and twenty thousand.” This was the last and finishing stroke of God’s avenging providence; which, to the happy deliverance of the succeeding race, completed the excision of that corrupt generation.

In the mean time however, whilst he exercised these marvellous, unrelenting severi-

7 Numb: xxv. 9. 1 Cor: x. 8.

ties against that stubborn and devoted generation; it is no less curious than pleasing to observe, with what infinite condescension, as well as kindness, he undertook the guardianship of their rising progeny; with what affectionate care he watched and defended the infirmities of their youth; and with what unwearied diligence he formed their minds, and regulated their manners, as they grew up. To this end, he renewed his covenant with them: he repeatedly instructed them in all the momentous parts of his law: he laid before them various motives to engage them in the faithful observance of it: and “he led them about” with their devoted fathers; that, seeing in their punishment the miserable consequences of apostasy and disobedience, they might cautiously avoid such pernicious examples, as would prompt them to neglect or transgress their duty.

These were excellent means of improvement. And as by these means they were trained up into a right notion of the divine majesty; and early impressed with a deep sense of his supreme authority; so by the
continued

continued application of strict discipline, and the constant display of miraculous power, they were brought at length to be tolerably well attached to his government, and established in his pure worship.

When they became thus tractable, dutiful and obedient; and had approved themselves as fit agents for carrying on the purposes of his providence; God then conducted them towards the land of Canaan—the place of their destined habitation; and assured them, if they continued faithful, of their speedy conquest and possession of it.

And, here, to engage their reliance upon him, and to strengthen their confidence the more in him, he recounted to them his former promises; and appealed to their own experience how punctual he had been in the accomplishment of them. He put them in mind, that, though he had been obliged to chastize them for their benefit, and even to cut off from among them the refractory and infectious; he had nevertheless been still true and faithful to his word; still careful of the main body; since it appeared by the

muster now taken, that their number on the whole was nearly as great, if not greater than it was before². And if, in a state of disobedience, they were not diminished by the hand of God; they might well conclude, that, in the prosecution of their duty, they should never be destroyed by the hands of men.

But, notwithstanding the conclusion they might draw from hence; as the undertaking they were soon to enter upon was seemingly difficult and full of danger, so God was pleased to afford them still more obvious proofs, and to support them by still more animating encouragements. He led them on against several powerful, idolatrous nations; who opposed and obstructed their passage: and over these he vouchsafed them an easy conquest, as a pledge of their future success in Canaan. For they must needs look upon what he had now done, as an earnest of what he had promised to do farther, for them.

² Comp. Numb. xxvi. 51, 62. with Exod. xxxviii. 26.

Such then was the progress of divine administration, during the abode of the Israelites in the wilderness. And from the whole tenour of this administration it appears; that the great point, which God had more immediately in view, was to fit and dispose this wavering people to answer the end for which they were chosen: that his chief point was, to “humble them, and to prove them—” to bring them close, and attach them, to himself; that, being at length firmly bound to his service, they might be ready and willing, as it was designed they should, to promote his true religion and worship, in opposition to the reigning idolatry:

And upon this foundation it is easy to account for all the statutes and judgements he gave them; and for all the pressing exhortations to the careful observance of those statutes and laws^a. It is easy to account for the eminent blessings annexed to obedience; and for the curses denounced against vice,

^a Deut. iv. 1—40.

and apostacy^b. It is easy to account for the strict prohibition of all communication with the idolatrous nations^c; for the seeming severity of commanding their cities to be all destroyed, together with the monuments of their superstitious worship^d; and also, for the abolition of all customs, which had any reference to such practices^e. The necessities of the times, the welfare of religion, and the improvement of the world, called for these things. For they were all, either so many motives to, and enforcements of, true piety; or prudent cautions, and needful barriers, against the encroachments of wickedness and idolatry.

Thus then we see what proper provision was continually made for the knowledge and adoration of the true God, among his peculiar and chosen people; and how well they became qualified thereby to advance the design and purpose of his providence, with re-

^b Deut. xxviii. 1—68.

^c Ibid. vii. 1—5.

^d Ibid. xii. 1—3.

^e Ibid. xiv. 1. 3.—xvi. 21, 22.

gard to the rest of the world. And knowing now that it was in his purpose from the beginning, to make “all the nations of the earth finally blessed” through this dispensation; what thanks should we render to the Lord for his goodness; who, notwithstanding the favours he shewed to the Israelites, “had still provided some better and nobler thing for us that they, without us, might not be made perfect^f.”

Now to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour and glory, world without end. *Amen.*

^f Heb. xi. 40.

S E R M O N XII.

P S A L. xliv. ver. 3.

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.

WHEN the Almighty had raised up, in the manner related, proper inhabitants for the land of Canaan, his miraculous providence conducted them to it, and gave them possession of it.

Now, as the conquest of this land was first promised, and then secured to them,

not merely for their own sake, but rather as a means of carrying on the grand design, which God had originally purposed; so it is natural to presume, that the measures, by which it was to be now achieved, must bear some reference to that design, and contribute in their degree to the promotion of it. And indeed, if we sedately consider these measures, and closely observe their effects and tendencies, we shall find them adapted, with exquisite propriety, to the advancement of the end in view;—to the extirpation of idolatry, and the establishment of true religion. For they all conspired to fill the nations with wonder and astonishment; to imprint on their minds high conceptions of the majesty of Jehovah; and to render them sensible of the sin and folly of placing their reliance, hope or confidence in any other God but him.

To evince the truth of this assertion, let us first attend to the general plan, that was laid down for the acquisition of the country. It was to be undertaken and prosecuted by war. Now, had the acquisition of the
country

country been the whole that was intended, it is easy to conceive, that God might have accomplished it in a different manner from that which depended on the force of arms. He might have destroyed the inhabitants by famine or pestilence; and introduced his people into all their possessions without the trouble of drawing a sword. But this mode of proceeding, however effectual in gaining the land, would seemingly have answered no higher purposes. It would neither have manifested to the world the power and greatness of the *true* God, nor exposed to view the weakness and futility of *false* deities: whereas the *other* method brought these points directly to the test, and made them obvious to all people. For all nations having then their tutelary deities, to whose protection they committed themselves and their country; and of whose power they judged by the fate of war; it is evident, that an attack upon any country was virtually an attack on those guardian gods, who were supposed to be the defenders of it; and whose strength was put to a trial in the contest.

Hence

Hence then it follows, that this war in Canaan was a kind of *holy war*; maintained on the one side by the worshipers of Jehovah in opposition to the idolatrous nations on the other. The success therefore, which he vouchsafed his people, must be acknowledged, even on the principles of heathenism, to have been a full proof of his superior power, and sovereign authority over their idol gods: and consequently must be looked upon as an excellent mean to convince them of the absurdity of depending on such gods, in preference to the God of Israel: as it must also be a strong and forcible motive to induce them now to alter their opinion; and to adopt him for the object of their worship, who was *possessed*, and shewed them he *was* possessed, of so great and uncontrollable a power.

And that his power might appear still more conspicuous, still more incontestable; he disposed, we are to observe, the whole train of operations in such a manner, that the conquest was made not only with ease and rapidity; but also made by a young, raw, unpractised

unpractised infantry, fighting, at all disadvantages, with strong, hardy, experienced veterans, supported by a numerous cavalry. A circumstance which clearly demonstrated, that “they gat not the land in possession through their own sword;” but by the marvellous assistance of his arm, who, “at the instant he speaketh concerning a nation or kingdom, to build and to plant it, or to pull down and destroy it^ε,” can accordingly bring it to pass.

But let us now quit these *general* reflections; and proceed to investigate those *special* inferences, which may be farther drawn, to the same purpose, from the consideration of the *particular* achievements recorded.

It has been already observed, that the war now waged in the land of Canaan may properly be called *the war of the Lord*; as being carried on with a view of planting in that land his true religion and pure worship, instead of those detestable rites of idolatry, that were then universally practised. Agree-

^ε Jer. xviii. 7, 9.

ably therefore to such an intention, God, at this time, joined the religious to the regal character; and preceded his people, not merely as the governor or king of Israel, but expressly as “the Lord of the whole earth^h;” as that sovereign Being, who had a just right to the homage and obedience of all mankind; and might equitably punish their contempt or refusal.

To make them sensible, that he came now to demand his right, and to establish his worship among them; he ordered the ark (the symbol of his *presence*, and the sacred repository of his *law*) to be taken up by the priests, the ministers of his religion; and to be conducted forwards to that land, where he had promised, and was determined, to fix it. And that nothing might be wanting to influence and persuade the inhabitants of the land to give it proper reception; and to accept the Lord, whose ark it was, for the object of their faith and worship; he plainly shewed them, that his presence was continually with it—and that his power was en-

^h Josh. iii. 13.

gaged to support those in every emergency, who attended it, revered it, and were attached to it. For no sooner “were the feet of the priests dipped in the brim of the water,” but the overflowing of Jordan instantly retired; so that its channel became, and continued, dry, “until all the people were passed overⁱ.”

This miracle, one would judge, might be sufficient in reason to awaken the Canaanites to a due sense of the majesty of Jehovah; and, consequently, to a due acknowledgement of the right he claimed to their submission, their worship, and their obedience. But the men of Jericho, blindly devoted to their own deities, overlooked the grandeur of this mighty act, and, contemptuously refusing the overtures that were made, prepared themselves to oppose his people.

Provoking as this conduct really was, yet God, patient and long-suffering, unwilling that they should perish, and solicitous that

ⁱ Josh. iii. 15---17. The passage now opened for the Israelites was about eighteen miles in breadth; and therefore the more wonderful.

they

they might repent, graciously allowed them time to reflect; and pressed them to comply by repeated applications for the space of *seven days* together. All this, though it has lain unnoticed, is manifestly implied in the account we have of the proceedings at the siege of Jericho.

When the Israelites, by the command of God, marched round the city in the order described^k; it is natural to conclude, from the wisdom of him who gave the command, that it was done with some great and instructive design; with a view to convey some salutary lesson. To our commentators indeed this transaction has unhappily appeared in no higher light, than that of shew or pastime; and has been treated by unbelievers accordingly. But to the besieged, I am convinced, it appeared in a different, and a very important, light. For they must needs know, if they knew any thing of the modes of the times, and the customs of their own country, that the whole was a

^k Josh. vi. 3---16.

solemn, religious procession¹. They must needs know, if they knew the rites of their own worship, that “the priests blowing with the trumpets” was a loud call or invitation to them to come out and join the ark; and to adore the God to whom it belonged. And they must needs also know, if they knew the grounds of their own military exhibitions, that “the armed men walking before,” was a positive, though emblematical, declaration—that, in case they persisted to flight and reject these gracious invitations; these overtures of mercy now made; the sword would overtake them with relentless

¹ VIRGIL, who is peculiarly accurate in his accounts of ancient manners, represents Dido, a Tyrian, and consequently a descendant of this very people, as making a *solemn, religious procession* exactly in the same form: *Æneid*. IV. ver. 63.

Aut ante ora Deum pingues spatiat ad aras.

“She walks *before* the images of her gods quite *round* the altar.” And that the Jews observed the same custom, is evident from the *Psalmist’s* allusion—“And so will I *compass* thine altar.” *Psal.* xxvi. 6. See also *Nehem.* xii. 27---43. And Jericho may not improperly be considered now as an altar; whereon “the Lord,” to speak in the words of the prophet Jeremiah, xlv. 10. “had great sacrifice to make.”

fury,

fury, and punish their obstinacy by a total excision ^m.

Now, knowing this to be the true language, and real meaning of the present transaction; how justly did they deserve to fall under the vengeance of that God, whose power and goodness they had so perversely despised! And how demonstrably evident was

^m To explain the intention, and illustrate the meaning of this complex ceremony, it may be proper to observe, 1. that *trumpets* were used among all people for two different purposes: to *call assemblies*, when they blew a *clear, short* blast; and to sound an *alarm* for the onset of battle, when they made a *rough and long* blast. Now, here they are employed in both these ways—in the way of *call* or *invitation* by *short* blasts, during the several processions; and, at last, in the way of *alarm* by a *long* blast, (comp. ver. 5. and 10.) when the city was to be assaulted. Hence then it appears, that the city was not attacked, till the inhabitants had *thirteen* several times rejected the overtures, that were made to them; and this, even when they understood, that the Israelites were determined to punish their refusal. For it is to be observed, 2. that the *armed men* going before, were, in a military view, just so many *heralds at arms*; who, by their movements and gestures, significantly declared to the inhabitants of Jericho, that, if they obstinately persisted to reject their offers, especially when urged in a solemn manner for *seven* days together, (the utmost term allowed for deliberation; see 1 Sam. xi. 3.) they must expect to feel the rigour of their vengeance in a *fearful and total* destruction.

it,

it, that the Israelites were charged with his special commission, when “the wall of the city fell down flat,” or rather, “sunk quite level with the groundⁿ,” to smooth their passage for the destruction of that people, which had impiously “defied the armies of the living God?” And if this amazing overthrow was completed on the *sabbath*; on the day peculiarly devoted to the honour and service of the God of Israel^o; how plainly must it appear to be the judgement of his hand for the contempt thrown on his religious character? And upon the whole, what a significant prognostic, what a sure earnest was there given hereby to the whole world, that his religion and worship, however despised, would finally prevail over all the opposition that could ever be made to its growth and establishment?

Now, if the vengeance taken, in so marvellous a manner, on this obstinate and im-

ⁿ Josh. vi. 20.

^o Vide Talmud Babylonic. Tract. de Sabbatho cap. I. RAYMUND. MARTINI Pug. Fidei, cum observ. Jos. DE VOISIN. p. iii. dist. iii. cap. xi. § 29. p. 625.

pious city, could have no influence on the rest of the nations, to make them renounce their wickedness and idolatry, and surrender themselves to God and his people; what else can in justice be expected to follow, but that, since they chose to persist in the same crime, they should feel the rigour of the same punishment? They had warning sufficient given them. And what they saw executed with so much severity, should have induced them to avoid what was farther threatned. The fall of Jericho, and the destruction of Ai, at the same time that they were punishments to some, were admonitions to others. And how well they were adapted to work on serious and considerate minds, is evident from the conduct of the Gibeonites; who, though they had probably disregarded the proposals, which the Israelites had made, at first^p, were yet now perfectly convinced, that

^p That the Israelites made offers of peace to the Canaanites, on condition they renounced their false deities, and acknowledged Jehovah for their only God; is evident, I think, from what has been said in explaining the siege of Jericho. But the same may be still more clearly deduced from the precept delivered

that it was madness and folly to continue the opposition; and hence prudently became disposed, not only to forsake their idol gods, but to seek the friendship of the children of Israel; to join them in the worship and service of the Lord—in the belief and practice of true religion.

Such prudence, however, was the happy lot of these men alone. The other states re-

vered in Deut. xx. 10, &c. where it appears, that proposals of peace were to be made to all nations: but peace being refused, they were to proceed in a more rigorous manner with the Canaanites, than with any *other* people: of the latter, to kill only the *males*; of the former, to save *nothing* alive that breathed. Some writers, indeed, have been led to conclude, from what we read in the 15th verse, that this privilege belonged only “to those cities, which were not of the cities of the Canaanites.” But this is a wrong conclusion: and must needs appear wrong to any one, who attentively considers the reflection that occurs Josh. xi. 19, 20. “There was no city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon; all other they took in battle. For it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel to battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and *that they might have no favour*—” which manifestly implies, that if they had sought peace, and not come out to battle, they might have obtained *favour*, and not been destroyed. That the Jews understood the text in this sense, is evident from MENASSEH BEN ISRAEL’S Conciliator, Quæst. viii. in Deut. p. 230, &c.

mained still under the wretched influence of blind zeal, and infatuated superstition. Actuated then by a strongly envenomed and superstitious spirit, the five kings of the Amorites immediately combined together, and determined to extirpate the inhabitants of Gibeon, as traytors to their country, and apostates from its guardian gods. Hereupon therefore the Lord, whose honour was concerned in the support of his new converts, commanded Joshua to succour the Gibeonites; and, by way of encouragement, assured him of a complete and decisive victory over that powerful army, which had injuriously assaulted this innocent people. Joshua, in obedience to the divine command, “fell suddenly on the Amorites; “slew them with a great slaughter⁹,” and put them to a total rout. But then, lest the victory should be attributed to the sole prowess and management of the Israelittes, the Lord, ’tis to be observed, so conducted the order of the battle, that his power was seen in several

⁹ Josh. x. 9, 10.

incidents;

incidents ; and his superiority over the heathen deities displayed to the view of all. For the three principal deities, whom the Amorites adored, and in vindication of whose violated honour they seem to have entered on the present attempt, were the Sun, Moon, and Heavens or Air. To convince them therefore that these gods were entirely subject to the God of Israel ; and to punish them, at the same time, for the false worship they paid them ; “ the Lord thundered against them from heaven, and showered in their faces great hailstones ^r from the air, which flew vast numbers of them ^s ;” and then stopt the two great *luminaries* in their course, till the Israelites had completely vanquished the remainder ^t.” And God, it should seem, inspired now the Hebrew general to call for this miracle “ in the sight of Israel,” to deter them from the practice

^r Or perhaps *real stones*, many showers of which history records to have happened. See CALMET’S Dissertation on the subject.

^s Josh. x. ver. 11.

^t Ibid. ver. 12.

of the like idolatry; “from kissing their hands,” as the manner was, “when they beheld the sun as it shined, or the moon walking in brightness^u.”

It may be thought perhaps, that the only motive, which induced Joshua to put up his prayer for the prolongation of the day, was his earnest desire of gaining time to pursue his advantages; which otherwise, he apprehended, would be too short for the entire conquest and subversion of his enemies. But this, if indeed any motive at all, appears, however, from the circumstances of the narration, to be neither the only one, nor the chief. The mere finishing such a conquest seems to be scarce a sufficient ground for so extraordinary a petition. But admit it was; yet, how came the petition to be offered up at such a time? When the request was made, the greatest part of the enemy was destroyed, and the rest put to the rout: the day was but half spent, and the sun in the

^u Job xxxi. 26. 27.

*meridian**. Now, what is there to be discovered in the present circumstances, that could prompt the victorious and triumphant general to require such a miracle to be wrought in his behalf? He had light sufficient before him, in all probability, to accomplish his designs: or, if he found the victory unexpectedly retarded, would it not have been time enough to petition for a longer day, when he saw the sun low in its declension, and near its setting? These considerations would lead one to conclude that the prayer, now preferred by Joshua, was rather the effect of a divine impulse, than the result of his reflections on the event of the day; and that the chief purport of the miracle, exhibited in answer to it, was to convince both armies, and all who observed it, “that the gods of the heathens were but idols; and that it was the Lord who made,

* For the *Heb.* text says—“So the sun stood still בַּחַיַּת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ in the *midst of heaven*, or in the *mid-heaven*; and halted not to go down or decline about a whole day.” ver. 13.

—Καὶ τὸ ΜΕΣΟΝ τῆ ἡμέρας ἐ παρατετεύετο εἰς δυσμὸς. LXX.

—In *medio cæli*, neque festinavit ad occasum. *Syr.*

and who governed the heavens^y.” This at least must be acknowledged ; that it was admirably adapted to work such a conviction, whatever ends it might serve besides.

Marvellous and surprising as Joshua's conquest of these *southern* provinces appears ; yet so blind, and so inconsiderate were the *northern* kings, that they neither recognized therein the power of the Lord, nor indeed perceived “ the operation of his hands.” On the contrary, they attributed the misfortune, which their brethren sustained, to their fighting in small parties ; to their bringing erroneously into the field an inadequate number of men ; and trusting solely to the valour of their *infantry*. In remedy therefore of so fatal an error, these kings warily united their forces ; “ and went out, they and all their hosts with them ; much people, even as the sand that is upon the sea-shore in multitude, with *horses* and *chariots* very many ; and they pitched together at the waters of Merom, to fight against Israel^z.” This army

^y Psal. xcvi. 5.

^z Josh. xi. 4, 5.

was truly formidable; consisting, if we may believe Josephus, of no less than “three hundred thousand footmen, supported by ten thousand *horsemen*, and twenty thousand *chariots* ^a.” But, numerous and formidable as they were, God commanded his people to attack them; and upon this attack—to shew them that “he was the God of forces;” to manifest to the world, that “no king can be saved by the multitude of an host;” and that horses and chariots were but vain instruments of defence against his avenging power: to make *them*, I say, and *others* through them, duly sensible of these things; he “delivered them up into the hand of Israel; who chased and smote them till they were all destroyed ^b,” and who then got speedy possession of their country—divided it among themselves—and enjoyed it without farther disturbance.

Thus have we seen by what means Canaan was conquered; and in what manner its wicked and idolatrous inhabitants were destroyed. If we review these means by the

^a JOSEPH. Ant. Jud. lib. v. c. i. § 18.

^b Josh. xi. 8.

light which has now been thrown upon them; we shall find them in their nature wisely appropriated, and in their effects harmoniously conspiring, to that first and great design, which Providence had constantly in view;—the confutation and abolition of idolatry. And if we consider what an evil idolatry was; how excessively it weakened all the principles of religion and virtue; and how amazingly it encouraged all manner of vice and wickedness; we shall find it to be a design, truly worthy both of the wisdom and goodness of God, to put a stop to its spreading contagion. And if it should appear to be so widely spread and firmly rooted, that its growth and progress could not be stopped, but by the extirpation of those, who were most infamous for the practice of it; then surely such an act of excision, when the people were past all hopes of amendment, would be so far from being an act of cruelty or injustice, that it would perfectly accord with all the rules of the strictest equity: and however severe it might seem to the sufferers, must be an act of mercy to the rest of
the

the world.—Now such, in fact, was the case before us.

The Canaanites were a people deeply immersed in the superstitions of idolatry ; and, as the natural consequence of it, in the shameful practice of the most abominable impurities, of the most flagitious crimes, and the most inhuman cruelties^c. Various means had been already employed to correct and reform their manners. Could milder methods have prevailed, the examples and conversation of the holy patriarchs would have won and engaged them. Had harsher measures been of any effect, the tremendous destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah would have awed and alarmed them. Or had the present manifestations been of any avail, the gracious overtures made to all would have either allured them ; or, the consequent punishments inflicted on some, would have moved others to better obedience. But their perverseness was incorrigible. They would still maintain their idolatrous principles—still persevere in their vicious practices.

^c Wild. xii. 3—6. 11.

In compassion therefore to the world, and for the benefit of the rest of mankind, as these people could not be reclaimed, God determined to cut them off. And since their iniquities called for such an exemplary punishment; how wisely was it ordained, that it should be executed upon them by the hand of Israel, in preference to any other method^d! In this form it carried with it a public condemnation of that idolatry, to which their vices were chiefly owing; and served to destroy the root of these evils, as well as to demonstrate the indignation of God against those who were guilty of them. Nor could these ends have been so fully answered in any other manner. Unfruitful and unhealthy seasons might easily have been interpreted usual and common accidents. Plagues, fire from heaven, pestilences or famine might be thought to proceed from the displeasure of their own deities; and to be capable of being either prevented or removed by certain super-

^d JENKIN'S Reason. of the Chr. Rel. vol. I. p. 72. LOWMAN'S Dissert. on the Civil Government of the Hebrews. ch. xij. p. 221, &c,

stitious or magical ceremonies. Such punishments then, considering the notions and dispositions of the times, were extremely liable to be misconstrued ; were likely to be abused, to add strength and vigour to idolatry, rather than to weaken and root it out. But when God made choice of a peculiar people, professing his pure worship in plain opposition to all idolatry ; when he granted this people the possession of Canaan, and enabled them by his power to extirpate its wicked and superstitious inhabitants ; this was such a triumph, as clearly shewed his absolute dominion ; and conveyed to the world a visible confutation of the hope of idolaters : conveyed to the world a manifest proof, how vain it is to trust or rely on any other God, but on Him alone, “ who is perfect in holiness, as well as mighty in works.”

And as it served thus to bring over unbelievers to the acknowledgement and obedience of the one true God ; so did it contribute in an equal degree to keep his real worshipers on their guard ; to make them careful, that they might not be “ drawn
by

by the errour of the wicked, to fall from their own steadfastness^e.” For if the Canaanites were punished with so much severity for refusing to own Jehovah as God; what must the Israelites expect to suffer, if ever they became so degenerate and base as to fall away and apostatize from him? Surely they could not but be convinced, “that it had been better” and more tolerable “for them, not to have known the way of the Lord, than, after they had known it, to turn aside from the holy commandments delivered unto them^f.” And indeed, under the force of this conviction, and in gratitude for the kindness he had now shewn them, Israel, we are told, “served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that out-lived Joshua, and who had known all the works of the Lord, which he had done for Israel^g.”

Now to God the Father, &c. *Amen.*

^e 2 Pet. iii. 7.

^f 2 Pet. ii. 21.

^g Judg. ii. 7.