

AN
ARGUMENT
CONCERNING
The CHRISTIAN RELIGION,
DRAWN FROM THE
CHARACTER OF THE FOUNDERS.

Translated from the French of J. VERNET.

(S. J.)

H U L L :

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Though it is scarce possible to avoid judging in some way or other, of almost every thing which offers itself to one's thoughts; yet it is certain that many persons, from different causes, never exercise their judgment upon what comes before them, in the way of determining, whether it be conclusive and holds. They are perhaps entertained with some things, not so with others; they like and they dislike: But whether that which is proposed to be made out, be really made out or not, whether a matter be stated according to the real truth of the case, seems merely a circumstance of no consideration at all. Arguments are often wanted for some accidental purpose, but proof as such, is what they never want for themselves, for their own satisfaction of mind and conduct in life. Not to mention the multitudes who read merely for the sake of talking, and to qualify themselves for the world, or some such kind of reasons; there are even of those, who read for their own entertainment, and have a real curiosity to see what is said, several, which is prodigious, who have no sort of curiosity to see what is true; I say curiosity: because it is too obvious to be mentioned, how much that religious and sacred attention which is due to truth; and to the important question what is the rule of life, is lost out of the world.

Bp. Butler.

An ARGUMENT, &c.

CHAP. I.

In which the Argument is briefly explained.

THE preceding Book having served to shew that we are in possession of lights and muniments sufficient, upon the origin and establishment of christianity; we will now make use of them to see *what proofs* this history furnishes, of the truth of the christian religion.

The first of these proofs will turn upon the *character of the Master, and of his first Disciples.*

Under the word *character*, I comprehend, not only their manners; but also their external condition—their talents—their life and fortune; in a word, every thing that has a relation to their *persons.*

Although it may seem at first, that this consideration is foreign to the subject; and that it will be sufficient in order to judge of a doctrine, to examine it in itself, independent of the personal qualities of those who announce it; this

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however is, one of those cases, in which the better to assure ourselves of the truth, it is not a matter of indifference, after the examination of the doctrine itself, to see further, *from whom* it proceeds; because this is not a sort of natural science, that carries its own evidence in itself; the question is, concerning a doctrine taught upon the authority of a *divine revelation*, and founded in part upon *facts*. It is therefore very important to see, whether in the character and life of those who announce this doctrine, and who attest these facts, there be any thing which belies the sanctity of such a commission, and weakens the force of such a testimony; or whether on the contrary we do not find in both, materials to justify and prove the authority they assume.

It must be confessed, that the study of history and the view of what passes in the world, inspire no little distrust of what is called an *extraordinary personage*. Sometimes we find it a title lightly given to legislators and philosophers *merely*, who had not, nor pretended to have, any thing more than natural lights; though their disciples from *excessive veneration*, have pronounced them more than men. This has happened in China with respect to Confucius. Sometimes we find that these pretended extraordinary personages are only visionaries and fanatics, capable of forming strange conceits, but in reality deserving only the contempt of men of sense. Oftener we shall find these pretenders to inspiration, artful men, and so little cured of human passions, that they seek only to gratify them more surely, under the veil of sanctity.

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So many examples therefore create a just expectation, that those who first announce a religion, should be *above all suspicion* : And as in a matter so delicate and important, we cannot be too much on our guard ; the following conditions seem reasonably to be expected for our perfect security.

1st. It is requisite that a messenger from God, should announce himself *as such* ; and as having received a special commission, of which he gives *authentic proofs* : Otherwise, he is to be regarded simply as a teacher, whose understanding has been purified and rendered superior to that of others, *by natural means* ; and we should believe that it is *posterity only*, which by an *excessive veneration*, has attributed to him more than he did to himself, and has sought for something *miraculous*, where it was not.

2d. As it is of infinite moment, that those who call themselves *messengers of God*, should not deceive themselves, nor suffer illusions in their own minds, by weakness of understanding, (which often happens ;) the whole tenor of their lives, their discourses, and their writings, must bear a character of *reason and good sense*, which does not allow of their being confounded with visionaries.

3d. On the other hand, as the world is full of impostors, and we cannot put confidence in any one who calls himself the messenger of God, further than we shall be convinced not only of

his discernment, but also of his good faith ; it follows, that one of his essential qualities must be *probity*, clear unequivocal probity. We have even a right to expect, that those in whose mouth God deigns to put his word in an extraordinary manner, should give the world an example of piety and sanctity worthy of so eminent a title.

4th. These may be regarded as *essential* requisites in the character of a *messenger of God*. But if we wished for yet more security, and to banish the smallest suspicion; we might add, that we should be less distrustful of men, *without talents and without credit*, than of men, who holding a certain rank in the world, are used to have *extensive views* ; or of men of ability and eloquence, sufficient to form and enforce systems of their own. The less we find of these exterior qualities in the founders of a religion, the more we shall be induced to believe, that the grand and beautiful things we admire in it, proceed solely from a *superior cause*.

5th. But to be better convinced, that they have not acted from any human motive ; we shall perhaps have a further wish, *not to read* in their history, that they have attained worldly honours, or have lived in ease and affluence ; because, to say truth, when any *temporal interest* is mixed with it, the most agreeable appearance of devotion may be tarnished and become suspected.

With these *five conditions*, I do not see that we can desire more. Indeed the three first, as has
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been observed, are the only ones which are absolutely necessary; the two others are added to make assurance more sure, and carry precaution as far as it will go. Happily, this excess of precaution does not make against us; for whereas in surveying the authors of false religions, we find none of them who can bear such an examination; we shall see, that the authors of christianity *sustain it perfectly*; and in their persons unite in the highest degree, *all the characters*, of which we have spoken.

1st. It is very certain, that they have not acted or spoken as philosophers merely, or ordinary teachers; but that they have *positively asserted a divine mission*, and have desired to be list'ned to, on that foundation.

2^d. We see in them no marks of a *weak mind* misled by visions, or given to fanaticism.

3^d. In the third place, nothing is more *pure* than their manners; nothing more *irreproachable* than their lives; nothing more humble, more upright, more pious, than every thing that is known to us of their actions and of their discourses.

4th. If on the one hand, they were sensible men, such as are described under the second head; they were not however, on the other, of understandings so *acute and cultivated* as to be able to invent of themselves a whole plan of doctrine; nor to enforce this doctrine upon others, by their *credit* or their *eloquence*. We see on
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the contrary, that they were men of low condition,—of a common education,—without study, without fortune,—without credit,—accustomed to a mechanical profession,—not at all engaged in the affairs or the intrigues of the world, and consequently not at all fitted to act a part, that required confidence, authority, and talents,—

Lastly, to leave no doubt concerning the rectitude of their intentions ; and to remove every scruple on that head, we have only to observe, how they passed their lives, after they had engaged in their ministry ;—far from finding in it any thing to gratify sensuality or ambition, they found every thing that offends and mortifies the carnal man ; poverty ; labour ; contempt ; contradiction ; and suffering. And how did their laborious career terminate ?—In a painful and ignominious death. Such is the picture of their lives, and this, all they have gained from the world.

These different features united, form a *character*, which distinguishes *essentially* the founders of christianity from other leaders of sects, as we shall now shew more in detail.

CHAP. II.

Of John the Baptist, and of his Character.

BEFORE we come to the Founder himself of christianity, and those who may be called his coadjutors, in this great work; it will not be improper to say something of John the Baptist, who preceded him, and whose history is closely connected with that of Jesus Christ.

The person of John is known to us, by our gospels and by the historian Josephus.

If we should consider the gospels merely as a history of the times, we cannot deny that they attest at least, what was commonly believed in Judea. Now we see in them, that immediately preceding Jesus Christ, a venerable person arose in that country, of the sacerdotal race, who did not however enter into any class of sacrificers or of scribes, nor was engaged in the sect of the pharisees, nor of the sadducees; but after the example of the ancient prophets, and particularly of Elias led an austere life, and kept himself at a distance from great towns, in the country which the jews call the *desert*; but which was not without villages and inhabitants. There, with no less freedom than zeal, he censured the vices both of the high and the low; sparing
neither

neither the pharisees who had corrupted true piety by their false dévotions; nor the sadducees, who regarded the law only in a temporal and political view; nor those who aspired to eminence to gratify their avarice and their ambition; nor the bulk of the people, very corrupt and vicious; nor even the courts of the princes, sons of Herod, where there was great impiety and disorder. For as we see by the history, such was the degree of corruption, that the nation never stood in greater need of a rigid reformer; those who were most attached to religion and to their country, could not sufficiently lament the state to which they saw both the one and the other reduced; as well by the abuses we have spoken of, as by the introduction of a *Roman governor* into a part of the country, into Judea properly so called, which was the beginning of their subjection.

John the Baptist began by humbling the offenders; proving to them, that they were in great darkness with respect to God; although many of them, valued themselves on a kind of *worldly probity*. He afterwards exhorted them to repentance; baptized them in the river Jordan, according to the custom then used by some jewish doctors in receiving proselytes; and told them, that this was the best preparation they could make, in order to receive and comprehend the salutary lessons of the Messiah, who was soon to appear; “*Repent ye, for the kingdom of Heaven (or the reign of God) is at hand.*” Such was the subject and substance of all his preachings:
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So that the words of Ifaiah apply strongly to him;
 “ There is a voice which crieth in the desert,
 “ prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his
 “ paths straight.”

As the general expectation which then prevailed, of the near approach of the Messiah; might induce a belief, that they need not look farther than to the person of John, he takes care to correct this error; by apprizing them that this honour belonged to another; who was as much his superior, as a master is to the lowest of his servants. “ *I indeed, baptized you (or I wash you) with water, to lead you to repentance, but he that cometh after me is much greater than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear, he will purify (or baptize) you by the holy spirit and by fire.*”

The Jews being much given to flatter themselves with the hope, that the reign of the Messiah would be for them, a season of ease and prosperity; St. John to undeceive them, insists strongly on the necessity of *amendment*; and describes to them the Messiah, not only as a deliverer, but as a *judge and a master*, who comes to clean his floor, and taking the fan in his hand, separates the good grain; and blowing off the light straw and the chaff, casts it as useless into the fire.

Nothing gave so much security or vain confidence to the Jews, as their quality of being descendants of Abraham; on which they rested,

as if that alone would assure them for ever of impunity, and of the protection of God; on this account, St. John addresses himself in a vehement manner to the pharisees and sadducees; whom he saw come to him, full of this presumption. He goes so far as to use terms, which appear harsh; but which were proper to make them sensible, how little worthy their conduct was of the descendants of Abraham, as they boasted themselves to be: *“ Generation of vipers, says he to them, who has taught you, or who has made ye hope, to escape the wrath to come? Bear fruit suitable to repentance, and pretend not to say within yourselves, it is Abraham who is our father, for I tell you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham.”* Intimating that God might reject the unbelieving Jews, and adopt in their stead the Gentiles; who would become the true posterity of Abraham, in becoming the imitators of his faith, and so heirs of the promises made to him: To which he adds, to apprise them of the near approach of this dispensation, and to awaken the impenitent, *“ Already is the axe laid to the root of the tree, every tree then which beareth not good fruit will be cut down and cast into the fire.”*

Intimations so important, and supported by a conduct worthy of a zealous servant of God, soon made impressions on their minds; for it is said, that great numbers of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, of all Judea, and all the neighbourhood of Jordan, went to him, confessing their sins; and were baptized by him in the river. Publicans
also

also were seen to come, military men, pharisees, sadducees, in a word, men of every order; and each received from him the censures and exhortations of which they had need. There were also persons who attaching themselves more closely to him, became his disciples, and who afterwards were united with the Christians.

The zeal of this holy man, not confining him to rebuke the misconduct of individuals, he had the courage to reprove Herod the tetrarch, for having taken Herodias for his wife, seducing her from his brother Philip. This just reproach irritated these powerful persons the more, as no one else durst use the same freedom. John was then thrown into prison, and at length beheaded at the request of Herodias; which however did not prevent the sounder part of the people, from continuing to venerate his memory as a prophet, and even believing they saw his death avenged in the unfortunate war, in which Herod was some time after engaged against Aretas king of the Arabs. It is from the historian Josephus, that we learn this circumstance, at the same time that he makes an eulogium on John, very conformable to what the gospel has said of him; these are his words:

“ Many Jews have believed that this defeat of
 “ the army of Herod, was a just punishment of
 “ Heaven, on account of John surnamed the
 “ Baptist, whom he put to death, though he was
 “ a just man, who exhorted the Jews to embrace
 “ the truth; to be just to one another; and to
 C 2 “ observe

“ observe piety towards God by receiving
 “ baptism; telling them that this purification
 “ would be agreeable to God, not by confining
 “ themselves to abstain from any sin *for a time*,
 “ but by preserving the body in a state of per-
 “ fect purity, and above all, if the soul was pu-
 “ rified by justice. As this occasioned some
 “ commotion, by the great eagerness there was
 “ to hear his exhortations; Herod fearing some
 “ sedition would happen, by the ascendant he
 “ had gained over the multitude, ready for any
 “ thing, if he chose to excite them; thought it
 “ best to prevent this danger, that he might not
 “ have cause to repent when it was too late;
 “ this alarm therefore put him upon imprison-
 “ ing John in the fortress of Macherante, where
 “ he had him put to death. And the opinion
 “ of the Jews was, that the defeat of his army
 “ was the vengeance of God, provoked by so
 “ unjust an action*.”

We would observe on this passage, that Jose-
 phus who speaks much of Herodias in other
 places, says nothing here of the part she took in
 the death of John; and alledges no other cause
 for this event, than the politic fear of Herod. It
 is possible that two motives have concurred to
 produce this event, and that this prince who
 from distrust and resentment had already secured
 the person of John and kept him a long time in
 prison, was at length determined to get rid of
 him at the instance of Herodias who had not
 forgiven the injury, which she thought she had
 received

* Antiq. Jud. l. 18. c. 7.

received from him. An historian like Josephus, who did not write till fifty years after, might be ignorant of, or might not care to mention a particular which was well known, and which had not been dissimulated by a cotemporary author, as St. Matthew was.

But notwithstanding the omission of this circumstance, we see that Josephus agrees with the Evangelist in the main, by confessing that John was unjustly beheaded by Herod, and that his life and his discourses were truly worthy of a prophet.

Such then being, even by the acknowledgment of the jewish historian, the respectable character of the *precursor of Jesus Christ*; we may already form a judgment, of what was to be expected from Jesus himself. We shall see in the sequel, of what weight against the Jews, is this testimony of John; and what support it gives to preceding prophecies concerning Christ. It is sufficient at present to remark, that *the opening of the evangelical dispensation* announces something great; and that to judge of it by its commencement, we may expect to find very exalted views, and very edifying examples. But of this we shall be better convinced, from the inquiry we are about to make, into the life and character of Jesus Christ, and of his apostles.

CHAP. III.

1st Fact.—*That the Authors of Christianity are not merely Teachers, whom Posterity has magnified too much, but that they attributed to themselves a divine Mission.*

THE first circumstance which ought to be observed in the *character* of the authors of the christian religion is, that they have not spoken nor acted simply as philosophers or ordinary teachers; but that they have *positively asserted a mission and supernatural light*; and have required to be heard *on that ground*; we shall see soon, how far a certainty of this fact will carry us, altho' it seems at first sight, of no great consequence.

There have been many persons much celebrated, of whom we can form no certain judgment; because we are not sufficiently informed, with respect to their lives and their true character. For example, how can we determine what such persons as Orpheus or Minos or Numa really were; to whom more than human powers have been ascribed? not having any history of those times, nor any of their writings, we cannot say whether they gave themselves out for extraordinary men, or whether it was posterity that so represented them. It may be, that having formed certain political establishments with wisdom,

dom, and given lessons as philosophers, *the blind veneration* of the following ages has gone so far as to pay them divine honours. It is certain at least, that Confucius, so venerated in China, pretended only to that wisdom which he derived from the lessons of his predecessors. With regard to some others, such as Plato, on whom the admiration of his disciples has bestowed the title of *divine*, we cannot be mistaken; both his own writings and the histories of those times, make it perfectly clear, that he only professed himself a man of study, who sought truth as well as he could; having speculated on divine and human things by the best exercise of his own understanding, or after his master Socrates, another speculator like himself. And he has therefore acted as such a situation required, that is, simply advancing his opinions as probable, and giving them all the support of *reasoning and of rhetoric*; a method as is evident perfectly human, and which shews on what foundations he rested: And as he pretended himself to nothing more; that of itself proves that nothing more, ought to be attributed to him. For if we should not lightly give credit to any man, who pretends to inspiration; we may well believe him, who makes no such pretension, and says nothing of so eminent a quality: A true messenger of God would not dissemble his mission.

Much has been said of *Apollonius Tyaneus*, who lived in the times of Vespasian and his sons. Philostratus the author who wrote his life, affects no less than to equal him to Jesus Christ,
by

by the miracles he attributes to him. But for this author, Apollonius would have been almost perfectly unknown. Philostratus is the only one who has written a history of him, and that, near *a hundred years after his death*: For we have nothing by Apollonius himself, *nor by any cotemporary writer*, by which to learn, whether this sophist does in fact attribute to himself, the qualities and the power, which his panegyrist bestows on him. It is probable he never thought of them himself, but the common people of his country, having told some miraculous stories of him, Philostratus, a long time after, thought proper to make a romance of them, to please a superstitious Empress *; so that the *marvellous* of this history, is all an after-invented fiction.

This is not the case with the founders of christianity;—besides their having lived in an age very well known to us, we have, *their own writings*, with divers histories *of the same period*; and the first use which we make of them, is to see *precisely*, in what quality they have spoken,—what they have said of themselves,—and what the first Christians who heard them, believed.—Now it appears from all the different documents, that Jesus *announced himself* as the Son of God; as the Christ promised by the prophets; and the deliverer look'd for by Israel. We see that he attributes to himself a supernatural power, which he claims to prove by divers miracles, to which he refers his hearers, and particularly to his *resurrection and his ascension*, as decisive confirma-

tions

* Julia the wife of Sept. Severus.

“ doeth, the Son doeth likewise; for as the fa-
 “ ther raiseth the dead, and giveth them life, so
 “ the Son giveth life to whom he pleaseth; the
 “ Father judgeth none, but hath given to the
 “ Son power to judge, that all may honour the
 “ Son as they honour the Father; what I say to
 “ you, I do not say of myself, it is the Father
 “ who abideth in me, who himself doth the works
 “ which I do—life eternal is to know the only
 “ true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath
 “ sent”—All the gospels are full of like decla-
 rations, by which he attributes to himself super-
 natural power, alledging his miracles and par-
 ticularly his resurrection, in proof of the autho-
 rity from God, with which he is invested. This
 avowal was maintained to the last, and before the
 judges; for the high priest having said to him,
 I adjure thee, by the living God to tell us if
 thou be the Christ the Son of God? “ Jesus an-
 “ swers I am, and I say further, that hereafter you
 “ shall see the Son of Man, sitting at the right
 “ hand of God, and coming on the clouds of
 “ Heaven” This declaration was so formal, that
 they made it a principal article of the charge
 against him, as the Jews acknowledge at this day.
 In fine, the last orders he gave to his apostles
 prove also the supreme authority, which he at-
 tributes to himself “ *All power is given to me in
 “ Heaven and on Earth. Go therefore, instruct all
 “ nations: Baptize them in the name of the Fa-
 “ ther, of the Son, and of the holy spirit; and
 “ teach them to observe all the things which I
 “ have commanded you; and lo, I shall be with
 “ you always to the end of the age.”*

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These discourses are not equivocal.—It is in the same manner that he is represented by the apostles ; they assert constantly, that he has proved his divine authority by his resurrection, by his ascension, and by sending the holy spirit ; they say, that it is in his name that they preach ; that it is in his name they cure diseases ; that it is in him we must believe, to have life, “ *We have seen with our eyes, says St. John, and we bear witness, that the Father hath sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever will acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God, God will abide in him and he in God.*”—St. Peter said the same thing, speaking to a great multitude of Jews. “ *After being, by the right hand of God, exalted ; and having received of the Father, the holy spirit which was promised, he hath bestowed it, as you now see and hear :—let all the house of Israel be assured, that God hath established as Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye have crucified.—God having raised his Son Jesus, hath sent him to bless you, by turning all of you from your iniquities.—There is no salvation by any other, for there is no other name under Heaven that is given unto men, by which we can be saved.*”—St. Paul held the same language to the Pagans ; as we may judge by the discourse which he made in the Areopagus at Athens. “ *God now commands all men, in all places to repent ; because he hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness ; by the Man whom he hath ordained for that purpose, of which he hath given assurance to all men, by raising*

“ him from the dead.”—The same apostle writing to the Romans begins his letter thus, “ Paul
 “ a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an a-
 “ postle, and set apart to preach the gospel of
 “ God (which he had before promised by the
 “ prophets in the holy scriptures) concerning
 “ his Son; who *according to the flesh is born*
 “ *of the race of David**, and who according to
 “ the spirit of holiness, *has been declared the*
 “ *Son of God* in a powerful manner, *by his re-*
 “ *surrection.*—These words shew, how the a-
 postles attributed to themselves also a divine au-
 thority, derived from that of Jesus Christ, and
 which proved itself, by the miraculous gifts
 which had been communicated to them.—Hence
 the title which St. Paul takes in his first epistle
 to the Corinthians, “ Paul called by the order
 “ of God, to be an apostle of Jesus Christ;—and
 “ afterwards he says, *that his discourses and his*
 “ *preaching, have not been of that kind which*
 “ *human wisdom employs to persuade, but that*
 “ *they have been a demonstration, founded on the*
 “ *spirit and the power of God; that your faith,*
 “ he adds, *might not rest upon the wisdom of men,*
 “ *but upon the power of God.*—*We have not re-*
 “ *ceived the spirit of this world, but the spirit,*
 “ *which cometh from God.*—*I am persuaded,* he
 “ says in another place, *that I have the spirit of*
 “ *God—we falsify not the word of God as many*
 “ *do, but we preach it with sincerity, as from*
 “ God

* There were, it seems, early doubts about the authenticity of the introductory chapters to the gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke, these doubts are stated in the 4th vol. of the Theol. Repository.

“ God, before God, and according to the spirit of
 “ Jesus Christ.—All this comes from God, who
 “ having reconciled the world to himself by Jesus
 “ Christ, has entrusted to us the ministry of this
 “ reconciliation; thus we execute the functions of
 “ ambassadors of Jesus Christ, and it is, as if
 “ God exhorted you, through us.”

It would not be difficult to accumulate a great number of passages, which shew equally, that the idea which we have of the *divine mission* of Jesus Christ and of his apostles, is not different from that which they themselves wished to give us of it. It is also the idea which the Christians had of it *from the beginning*, as appears by a chain of evidence which might be extracted from all the writers of the first centuries.—But what other proof is wanted than the *symbol of the apostles*, which is a confession of faith *very ancient*, where every thing supernatural which we attribute to Jesus Christ is to be found, and which *in substance* is certainly very conformable to the common belief of Christians, of all times and of all countries.

Even the Pagan writers serve to prove, that such in fact has been the belief of the primitive church; witness the famous epistle of Pliny, who accused the Christians of singing hymns to Christ as to a God; which evidently supposes that from the earliest times the Christians regarded Jesus Christ as a divine person, who had given convincing proofs of his dignity and of his power: And whence could they have had this idea in a
 time

time so near that of the apostles, if Jesus Christ himself and his apostles had not indeed spoken in the manner we have seen?

It cannot then be said, that what we see has often happened in other cases, has happened in this; that the disciples have said more than the master, and that certain institutions begun in a manner perfectly simple and natural, have received by degrees, additions of the miraculous kind *which did not belong to them*; by an improper endeavour to give lustre to their origin, and by fictions of which the first authors have never thought. In this case we have assurance of the contrary. All that we believe at present of the divine origin of the christian religion, has been *said, and written, and believed also, in the same manner from its beginning*; it is on this footing that the founders themselves have desired that we should receive what they taught; it is therefore on this footing they must be judged.

It is of importance also to remark, that the miracles which Jesus Christ and his apostles pretend to, are not things which came into their minds *by degrees*, as if circumstances had imbolden'd them, and insensibly led them farther than they at first intended: For even before the appearance of Jesus, the preaching of John announced him as a person far superior to himself: We see afterwards that the ministry of Jesus Christ commenced by the descent of the holy spirit, when he received the title of the well-be-
loved

loved Son of God ; a title which expresses at once, every thing we can conceive that is grand. He himself speaks as a legislator and a reformer sent from Heaven ; he calls his doctrine the establishment of the kingdom of Heaven ; he chuses apostles, he communicates to them his authority ; he works miracles ; he says that he brings remission of sins and salvation ; he asserts that he will give his life for the redemption of men ; that he shall rise again and be glorified ; and being risen, he will draw the world after him. All this is contained either expressly or by inference, in the discourses which our Lord held during the course of his ministry, without its appearing that he at all added to or altered his plan ; and indeed the system is so connected, and so perfectly of a piece, that no part of it can be detached.

It may be, that the apostles did not at first comprehend this plan in all its extent ; but it is certain however, that after the departure of their Master, their first preachings, and the first steps reported by St. Luke, and confirmed by their writings, laid open fully every thing they afterwards taught ; so that it cannot be said, that they have varied or extended their views according to occurrences ; it is not a doctrine amplified and retouched at random, but simple, uniform, conceived and delivered at once, in its whole extent, and in a manner fixed and determined.—Hence it is that St. John says, “ That
 “ he relates what has been from the beginning,
 “ what he has seen with his eyes, what he has
 “ contemplated and heard, concerning the word
 “ of

“ of life.”—And St. Paul reproving those who had the smallest idea of altering at all, or falsifying the gospel of Christ, declares that himself has never varied in his preaching, “ I would represent to you, says he to the Corinthians, the gospel which I have preached to you, which you have received, and by which you are saved, if you preserve it such as I have taught it to you : Otherwise you will have believed in vain. Now I have taught you principally, as I have myself also learnt,—that Jesus Christ died for our sins, that he was buried, that he rose again the third day, that he was seen of Cephas and afterwards of the twelve apostles—and they and I, thus we preach, and thus ye have believed.”—Such has been from the beginning to the end, the uniform simplicity of the apostolic preaching.

The reader sees clearly, that by these remarks we are advanced *one step* in the proof we have proposed ; for, as has been observed, there are but three parts for an unbeliever to take ;—One, is to say, that that has happened in this case, which we have seen happen in others, namely, that posterity *outdoing* the first authors of an institution, have added something *miraculous*, to what at first was simple and natural.—The second supposition is, that if the original teachers have attributed to themselves supernatural qualities, they may have been the *dupes of their imagination*, and seduced by a sort of *fanaticism*.—*Lastly*, it will be said, that if they have not ascribed to themselves such qualities by *error*, they have

have done it by *artifice*, and with *design to deceive men*. It is evident that unbelievers can have only one of these three suppositions to rest upon. On which will they rest? The first has been removed by what has been said in this chapter; it remains to overturn the other two, which we hope to effect in what follows.

CHAP. IV.

ad Fact.—That we cannot accuse the Authors of Christianity of Weakness of Mind nor of Fanaticism.

TO examine the question, whether the founders of the christian religion have not been the dupes of their imagination, as many fanatics have been, it is necessary first to examine terms; and to distinguish the different degrees of what we call *wisdom* and *folly*, in order to appreciate in some sort, the different classes of understanding.

1st. The natural state of the generality of men, is to have *good sense enough* to discern at least things within their sphere; and *memory enough*, to give an account of what they have themselves done, or of what they have seen and heard. It is by these qualities, that they are thought capable of managing their own affairs; of bearing testimony in a court of justice; and

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of performing divers functions of civil life, each in his station. Common sense is not denied to any person, unless he has given proofs of stupidity or madness. For though a man forgets himself sometimes, and commits faults by ignorance or levity, we don't say on what account that he is destitute of reason, nor would judges reject his testimony, on the score of weakness.

2d. Penetration and discernment may be carried much further in particular persons, owing to natural talents or cultivated education; and this is what constitutes *superior minds*. Such persons embrace many ideas at a time; know how to connect and arrange them; penetrate into hidden things; discern remote connexions, or nice differences; and are able to explain their thoughts with elegance and method. But great as this advantage is, it must be owned, in the common concerns of life, such persons will be found little superior to the other; and in what requires only *eyes and memory*, a moderate understanding is as perfectly clear-sighted as is necessary. Is there a call, for example, to give evidence in a court of justice on things we have seen? the testimony of a *peasant*, will not be thought of less weight than that of the most learned man. It may even happen that truth will be better told by a plain man, than by others, who often hurt their judgment by straining their reason.

3d. It is not uncommon for men with discernment enough, to have what is called both
weakness

weakness and warmth of imagination. This is the case when a tender brain, too much shaken by the sight or the idea of certain objects, agitates and heats itself, so as to render a man alarmed, disturbed, and in general too ready to be moved at light appearances. But though this temper of mind is capable of creating illusions, and especially on the first emotion, it does not however disturb the *senses*, nor destroy the judgment, so that we know what we say and are not at the mercy of continued visions.

4th. The highest degree of this sort of vivacity of imagination, will be *enthusiasm*, which consists in thinking on certain subjects with more emotion and heat than they deserve. Hence we give them more importance and reality than they naturally have, and being totally occupied with them we reckon every thing else, as nothing; and hence it may happen, that by some error of mind, we may mistake these emotions and thoughts when they are a little violent, for a sort of *inspiration*; and regarding, either external events, or our own dreams, with reference to this idea, may form out of them a *fanatical system*. Of this, there are many examples; and yet we cannot consider these heated heads as totally deranged, because though they deceive themselves on certain *intellectual* subjects; they are not capable of mistaking white for black, nor of losing all discernment with respect to *sensible* objects.

5th. But if the disorder of the brain goes so far as to form phantoms; and to make us think, broad awake, as a man does who dreams; for example to believe that one is a king; commands an army; is upon the sea, when in fact he is on land; that we live in a palace; have made such a voyage; got such an inheritance which has not happened;—In a word, if we have confounded or overturned the ideas of the most palpable things; this would not be called merely enthusiasm, but *delirium*; an excess that is uncommon, and which seldom happens but by accident, and for a little time in certain maladies.

But if this illusion instead of being temporary and with intervals, should become habitual and durable; this would be a state of madness, fit only for confinement.

These distinctions, though a little philosophical, were necessary here, because these different states of mind, are too often *confounded*; so as to include under the vague name of fanatics, persons of very different character—that there was for example, in the first followers of Mahomet a tincture of fanaticism mixed with much ambition; their history does not allow us to doubt; and this is accounted for without our being obliged to suppose them fools or visionaries: Because they were not called upon to believe in a series of miraculous facts, by which Mahomet proved his mission; he made not any such pretensions; it was merely being *too credulous* with respect to their leader, without having due proofs that
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there was any thing extraordinary in him, and that providence supported him against his enemies—The famous O. Cromwell has been suspected and not without reason, of maintaining something of the same character, or if he only feigned it, that he communicated this idea of himself however to many of his followers. But this does not extend to the belief of palpable falsities in matters of fact. They don't speak of public miracles which have been wrought, nor of any extraordinary sign, that was given. All their error consisted in some *intellectual opinion*, upon which it is much easier to mistake, than in what affects the *senses*.

As to those singular men, who appear at times, and call themselves *inspired*; we need not be much embarrassed in forming a judgment about them. These are not visionaries nor fools, properly so called; as they do not confound all ideas of things, nor deceive themselves with respect to *sensible objects*. They are only *enthusiasts*, whose brain being heated on certain subjects, they come at length to take their internal emotions for impulses of the divine spirit; and whimsically refer every thing they see, to the favourite idea with which they are possessed.

To apply these remarks to our subject;—I would in the first place ask those who suspect the founders of the christian religion of some disorder of the brain, *in what class they pretend to place them?*—Will it be, in that of persons of a weak imagination and too easily moved? But
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this turn of mind which is so common, would by no means serve to make Jesus Christ and his apostles persuade themselves *groundlessly*, of what we see they were well persuaded; nor to make them act as they have acted. Neither can we explain the conduct they have held, by ascribing to them that *vivacity of imagination* which forms enthusiasts; and leads them to believe *they are inspired*, in consequence of the internal emotions they feel, or of conceits, arising from some events rather singular, which they interpret as a particular direction of providence. For we see that Jesus Christ and his apostles alledge in their favour, things much more striking, and in which it is not possible they should be under the power of illusion. Jesus not only believed himself to be the Messiah and the Son of God, but that God visibly declared him to be so at his baptism.—He believed that he wrought miracles, on many different occasions, and in presence of many witnesses;—and he speaks of them as of facts *known and certain*. These miracles are not of a nature in which a man can be deceived; they are *palpable facts*. He speaks and acts uniformly even to his death, in the persuasion of his divine mission, and this coolly and composedly. He himself chooses disciples to execute his great designs. He is perfectly aware of the consequences of his undertaking as well with regard to himself as to others;—he foretells these consequences and prepares for them; he even institutes *before hand* a particular ceremony, to be a perpetual memorial of his crucifixion. He declares not less positively, that he shall rise again; he pro-

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mises the holy spirit to his apostles ; and without doing any thing to avoid or to retard his condemnation ; he goes to his execution, as to a kind of death that makes part of his plan, not less glorious to himself, than beneficial to the human race. His apostles not only believe in him during his life, but after his death,—they are persuaded that they have in fact seen him risen ; that they have conversed with him during forty days ; that they received his last orders ; and that after that, they have seen him ascend into Heaven. They are persuaded moreover, that they have themselves received the gifts of the holy spirit in a visible and striking manner ; in consequence of which they speak and act with an extraordinary zeal ; they believe, as well as their Master, that they perform divers miraculous cures ; and in this persuasion they quit all, to proclaim the gospel, to Jews and Gentiles, to Greeks and Barbarians ; to the exposing themselves on that account, to all kinds of perils and reproaches. If all these ideas have no reality, what name must be given to such a *strange assemblage of visions* ? It is not enough to call it weakness of mind or enthusiasm ; we must say that it is the last degree of extravagance, and the most singular example of folly that has ever been seen.

On this footing, it is easy to see to what the question is reduced ;—it is not enough to inquire, whether Jesus Christ and his apostles have been men of weak minds, but whether they have been absolutely fools, visionaries and madmen ; for thus far must the accusation go, and
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on this ground must the inquiry be made—But we shall see, that so far from being chargeable with any thing of this kind, we are not able to discover in them the smallest tendency to fanaticism.

CHAP. V.

Of the Character of Jesus Christ, and how far it was from Fanaticism.

I Desire the reader will recollect, what has been said in the preceding volume, of the beauty of the christian doctrine—of its conformity to right reason—of its just accommodation to the condition of man—of the excellency of its moral—of its utility for the present life—and of the grand views it gives us with respect to a future state.—After that, let the same reader say, whether he can digest the idea, that all this body of religion, has been invented by a weak man, and that they have been weak men only, who have preached it to the world with so much success; speaking of things divine, and of morals, better than the best philosophers have done. We certainly revolt at such an assertion; and what would unbelievers say, if we were to treat as foolish, the authors whom they most respect, because we found in them, opinions which we do not approve.

prove. If a system appears to have some solidity in its principles,—to be connected in its parts,—to have a proper end in view,—and to be clearly stated,—we do not venture, even if there be many things to find fault with, to say it is the work of a fool. But if we do not allow ourselves to decide so injuriously, against writers of very moderate talents, what shall we think of such a charge in this case?

It is by actions that we are best able to judge of the true character of men. But what shall we find in the conduct of Jesus, which denotes any disorder of mind? and what mark, I do not say of folly, but of caprice, can we observe, among so many particulars as are related of him? it would be singular that the history of a person of weak or whimsical conduct should furnish no trace of such conduct; but on the contrary that he should appear to act on every occasion, with dignity and decorum. It would be very surprising that his enemies, far from treating him with contempt as a weak man, should always attack and contradict him with great seriousness. For though when they heard him say, that he had power to quit life, and power to resume it, some Jews ventured to say, "He is possessed, he has lost his senses; why do ye hearken to him?" others judged better, observing that these were not the words and actions of one deranged. In fine, it would be also very surprising, that one who had given plain proofs of a disordered mind, should have been followed and admired even during his life-

time.

time, as Jesus Christ was, by numbers of people who certainly were not themselves divested of reason.

Let us consider his mode of life;—it was simple and uniform,---nothing affected; no singularity in his dress; no caprice, no inequality in his conduct; nothing rigid in his manners; nothing puerile in his piety; but sound and suited to social life. Though he lived himself in celibacy, a state more suitable to his character, and the shortness of his life; we see however that he expresses himself upon the subject of marriage with the greatest discretion; equally remote from the dissoluteness of certain fanatics, and from the whimsical rigour of some devotees, who regarded not the state of society. Far from any thing like misanthropy, he acted towards men with humanity, correcting them with mildness, and compassionating their distresses; he affected no revolting austerities; had intercourse with every body; and went where he was asked, even to feasts and marriages, but always with a decorum that was suited to him; he was kind to his relations, friends, and disciples, not affecting to divest himself of natural and reasonable affections. As on the one hand we see nothing in him of frivolous fear, or superstitious weakness; on the other, there is nothing of that stiff and haughty wisdom, which certain sophists have shewn. His character is a just mixture of sensibility and firmness; of humanity and serenity; which has always been regarded as the proper proof of a *wise and well-regulated mind.*

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But let us hear him speak; for words as well as actions discover any thing that is improper in the state of a man's mind.—What can be more serious and discreet than every thing he says? one sees *nothing* of that *mystical jargon*, and obscure *verbiage*, which belong to fanatics; nor of the contradictions, which occur at every turn in those who are carried on by the warmth of their imagination. The more we study his discourses, the more of wisdom we discover in them; he never speaks but seasonably, and for an useful purpose; and suitably to times, to places, to persons, and circumstances; though he says things that are great in themselves, he says them in a manner that is simple and popular; there is nothing oratorical, nor of those rabbinical subtilities, so much in vogue at that time. He uses the method which the ancients have regarded as the most natural, that of conversation; in which by taking occasion from every thing that presents itself, and speaking to men according to the measure of their understandings, he imperceptibly leads them to the discovery of certain truths; which he inculcates upon them by familiar comparisons, by short but animated reflections, and by sententious maxims, which like so many *luminous points*, awaken the understanding, and dispose it to thought.—It was thus that he instructed the people, enlightening their minds, in this way, better than by studied and methodical harangues. His language is natural; familiar without being low; noble without being inflated; of a serious simplicity; and such

precisely as the nature of the subject requires^u.—
 One may say that his stile has great energy, and a certain ingenuousness which we perceive the more, as we understand more clearly the object of the speaker, the circumstances of the times, and the *oriental manner*: for we should be well aware here, as in all ancient writings, of the *difference of language and customs*, without a correct historical knowledge of which we shall lose every thing, and even find obscurity in modes of speaking formerly common; and in allusions to which we have not the key. But if we endeavour to obtain some information, if only, from the paraphrase of Dr. Clark, or short notes like those of Beaufobre and L'enfant, (not forgetting the fine preface to their version) this slight study, which does not exceed that which we bestow on any classic author, will suffice (with an honest and good heart and intention) to shew us, that the language of Jesus Christ is indeed the true language of wisdom.

He had often captious questions proposed to him. The pharisees, for example, thought to have ensnared him by asking him, whether it was lawful to pay tribute to Cæsar. If he had said no, that would have been enough to have accused him before the Roman governor;—and if he had said yes, they would have made that a charge against him
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to the people, who flattered themselves with being delivered from this burden by the Messiah, and regarded as a bad patriot, whoever declared in favour of their subjection. What is the conduct of Jesus?—He asks them to shew him a piece of the money current in the country, and with which they pay the tribute; it was a Roman Denier; he asks them whose image it was stamped with—they answer Cæsar's; then on the ground of their acknowledging themselves, that they were subject to the Romans, and to shew them that subjection to a foreign power, is not incompatible with the duties of religion; he says to them, *render to Cæsar what belongs to Cæsar and to God what belongs to God.* I cite this instance among many others, that we may judge whether these are the answers of a weak man.

If there be any philosopher of antiquity, whom we may venture to compare with him as a teacher, it would be Socrates. Some persons indeed have pointed out many circumstances of likeness in the life and character of the one and the other. Both, so to speak, have made philosophy descend from Heaven to Earth, as was said in praise of Socrates, for having left astronomical speculations, for the sake of applying the study of wisdom to what concerned *morals and the conduct of social life.*—Both of them found men's minds spoilt with useless subtilities; in Judea the false devotion of the pharisees prevailed; at Athens the vain science of the sophists.—The falsehood of each was to be laid open, in order to bring men back to the *true and the simple*; and for this purpose each employed a method
much

much alike—neither one nor the other affected an air of singularity—their life was uniform, sociable and communicative. They disdained the jargon of schools, and the pomp of orators; contenting themselves with giving instruction in the way of conversation, as occasions occur'd; sometimes taking occasion, when it could be done naturally. Both employed the mode of interrogations, comparisons, and parables; mixing in their discourses short and apposite maxims. Neither one nor the other have left any thing in writing, contenting themselves with forming disciples, who have collected and published their doctrines. Lastly, both one and the other, drawing on themselves very innocently, the hatred of the enemies of truth, have been publicly accused and condemned to death, and undergone their sentence with the greatest resignation—these are the circumstances of *resemblance*, which have been observed between these two persons; to which we may oppose also *differences* as great, and all in favour of the chief of the Christians; who had views much more elevated, and manners much purer; who taught a doctrine more excellent, and was invested with an authority infinitely more respectable. But confining ourselves to the parallel, who does not see the result of it, with respect to the present question?—The praises of Socrates place him at the head of all the sages of antiquity: How then can we refuse to give the same praises at least to him, who excels so greatly? And while we exalt the one so much, how dare we degrade the other, and treat him as a visionary and enthusiast? where else, is there an instance of such unjust partiality?

CHAP. VI.

Continuation of the same Subject; in which is shewn that the Charge of Stupidity or Fanaticism does not lie against the Apostles, any more than their Master.

IT is allowed that the apostles were not of themselves, men of genius or great knowledge; and we shall see presently, that their *mediocrity of talent*, agreed perfectly with the *nature of their ministry*: But on the other hand we should deceive ourselves much, if we took them for weak and stupid men.—There is a great interval between imbecility of mind and great talents; between gross ignorance and great knowledge. It is this middle space that comprehends the bulk of mankind; who without being able to teach, or of refined understandings, have however sound judgment; and are not deficient in the knowledge necessary to their condition, and for acting and speaking properly, in the common business of life. This *middle situation* is precisely that of the apostles, considering them at least in their natural state, and independent of every thing they learnt of their master. They were men confined to a mechanical station, and of a common education; capable however of discerning

discerning things within their sphere; moderately conversant in the scriptures; and reasoning pertinently on what they knew. Though they have been accused of rusticity, yet never have they been suspected of falsehood; having indeed never given the smallest sign of it. Their manner of life, uniform and perfectly simple, did not lead them to indulge their imagination with chimeras; nor to waste their understandings in vain subtilties. It is true, they were not superior to all prejudices; but these were *not* prejudices in favour of singular and visionary opinions; but of the common opinions of their times and country;—attachment to objects of sense;—expectation of a temporal Messiah;—desire of the first places in his kingdom;—ideas, that the law of Moses and the temple, were to continue always;—difficulty in conceiving things that militated with their sentiments; and in forming ideas more elevated and spiritual.—This was what properly constituted their *grossness of understanding*:—But this was a disposition, which instead of rendering them *credulous* with respect to the gospel, would rather make them *revolt* at it.—It is true, persons of narrow views, are inclined to credulity with respect to every thing which relates to the prejudices, in which they have been brought up;—experience shews us that the common people adhere to such prejudices without examination, and admit lightly every thing that has any connexion with them. But when *new facts*, and *new opinions* are in question; far from implicit submission, it is the common people who make the greatest resistance; and the
reason

reason is very natural: Attached to their customs, and confined within a certain circle of ideas, they cannot go beyond them; nor readily see or listen to any thing that is opposite to their ordinary conceptions.—Now such was the case with the apostles, and hence it happened, that far from shewing themselves *credulous* with respect to what they were taught by Jesus Christ, they often obliged him to complain of them, as *slow of mind and hard of belief*; and indeed, with what difficulty did they conceive the meaning of his doctrine, when it was raised a little above the level of their understanding.—What slowness in yielding to the proofs which he gave them?—What precautions were taken by St. Thomas, before he would believe in the resurrection of his master?—Distrust could not be carried further.

It is true indeed, that men of moderate parts, easily give credit to the discourse and relations of a person, in whom they have a confidence. But it is not so, about things which are the *objects of their senses*, and of which they are themselves witnesses. For their eyes enabling them to see as well as others, and being chiefly accustomed to occupy themselves with sensible objects, we see that they have in these matters a very correct discernment, and that they are perhaps less subject to deceive themselves in such cases, than persons of a more speculative turn of mind. Since then the persuasion of the apostles was not produced by *hearsays*, but by things which they *saw with their eyes, and*
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touchèd with their hands, I do not see that the mediocrity of their understandings ought to make them more suspected of credulity, than others, on subjects of this nature.*

But they might, it is said, have been credulous in consequence of a *disordered imagination*, which converts visions into realities; such is the case of *fanatics*.

I would observe first, that this accusation is in direct opposition to the preceding one. For fanaticism is seldom found but among men of an *excessive vivacity* of mind, the reverse of that heaviness and *stupidity*, which are perpetually charged on the apostles—sometimes they are treated as weak men, and sometimes as wild—but we should settle finally on the character we would assign to them.

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* The distinction is material; and places in a different predicament, those circumstances which *do* rest on *hearsay*; but which from their nature requiring stronger evidence, may be received with *suspense of judgment*; and so leave the great articles, which do not rest on hearsay, less influenced by difficulties, which embarrass the ingenuous, and aid the *willing sceptic*—the evangelists were employed in their mission more than twenty years, and were then induced by different motives to put their information in *writing*; and they seem to have done it sometimes, with the addition of those circumstances of the magnifying kind, which naturally gather about *facts*, orally related for any length of time.

It is of the nature of *oral relation*, says Coguet, to corrupt facts and annex extraordinary circumstances,—it is the office of criticism, to examine and separate.

this in the conduct and discourses of the apostles, that we should have a difficulty in discovering the *smallest trace* of fanaticism.

Every thing that we know of them, indicates a state of mind, that is simple and natural. Nothing whimsical in their mode of living; no affectation in their external appearance; nothing rough or irregular in their proceedings.— They follow their master, and listen to him while he is with them: Afterwards they go and execute the orders he has given them, to announce his doctrine to the nations. All this is done with order and decency; whether they act separately or in concert, every thing denotes a conduct, that is grave and regular. They have to speak sometimes to the Jews, and sometimes to the Pagans, and how do they do this? By speaking suitably, and accommodating themselves perfectly to the state and different temper of mind of the one and the other. To the Jews they alledge the prophecies, and rest on the authority of the scriptures—with the Pagans they use a different method; they resort to natural light, and assert facts of the truth of which every one is able to judge. They don't say that we must renounce our reason; and their discourses will never be charged with the pious nonsense of fanatics. They desire on the contrary, that reason should be respected; they appeal to good sense; and reason themselves, as justly and correctly as the nature of popular discourse allows.

A *fanatical devotion* shews itself in panic fears; in spleenetic humour; in vehement passions, and in sudden starts of conduct. Nothing of this sort is to be seen in the apostles;—every thing is *calm* and exhibits a piety that is gentle, and a discreet evenness of mind.

We cited some of the answers of Jesus Christ, let us observe a little the conduct of his apostles.—A lame man who had been long used to beg at the gate of the temple at Jerusalem, asked an alms of Peter and John. Peter said to him “*look on us,*” and he observing them with attention, and expecting to receive something from them, Peter said to him, “*I have
“ neither silver nor gold; but such as I have,
“ I give unto thee: In the name of Jesus Christ
“ of Nazareth rise up and walk.*”—What dignity is there in these words, and at the same time what simplicity?—But observe their modesty as well as their zeal; when the people, struck with this cure, admired the authors of it. “*Ye men of Israel, says the a-
“ postle to them, why marvel ye at this? Or
“ why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by
“ our own power or holiness we had made this
“ man to walk? The God of Abraham and of
“ Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers
“ hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye deliver-
“ ed up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate,
“ when he was determined to let him go. But ye
“ denied the Holy One, and the Just, and desired
“ a murderer to be granted unto you; and kill-
“ ed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised
“ from*

“ from the dead ; whereof we are witnesses ;
 “ And it is by faith in his name that this man
 “ hath been made strong, in the presence of you
 “ all.”—Is it possible to speak with more pro-
 priety, and make better use of the occasion,
 to announce the gospel?—What firmness also
 was there in daring in the face of the people,
 to pronounce so heavy a charge as their hav-
 ing denied justice, and put to death the Prince
 of life. They did not shew less courage and
 coolness before the supreme council of the
 Jews ; “ Ye rulers of the people, and elders of
 “ Israel, if we this day be examined of the good
 “ deed done to the impotent man, by what means
 “ he is made whole : Be it known unto you all,
 “ and to all the people of Israel, that by the
 “ name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye
 “ crucified, and whom God raised from the dead,
 “ even by him doth this man stand here before
 “ you whole.”—What do we find in this an-
 swer, that partakes of that *stupidity*, which is
 confounded and overpowered ; or of that *fana-*
ticism which rambles and is bewildered ? I see
 nothing but a noble confidence, and a wisdom
 equally simple and majestic, worthy of the truth
 which they proclaim.—Their judges having
 nothing to reply, employ prohibitions, and
 menaces ; and such menaces joined to autho-
 rity and hatred are more than bare words :
 But see, what these men oppose to them ;
 “ Judge ye yourselves, say they, whether it be
 “ right in the sight of God to hearken unto
 “ you more than unto God : For we cannot
 “ but speak the things which we have seen and
 “ heard.”

“ heard.” Is it possible in fewer words to confound injustice, without hurting lawful authority ; to shew intrepid courage, without failing in respect ; to justify one’s own conduct without complaining of others ; to raise oneself above all fears and all temporal evils, without opposing any thing to them but the *fear of God and the obedience which is due to him*?—The council dismisses them, after fresh efforts to intimidate them ; and when they gave an account to their brethren of these threatenings, the assembly instead of being terrified, betakes itself to prayer, and requests of God that he would increase the power and courage of his servants, and that he would extend his arm to multiply cures and miracles in the name of his Son Jesus ; all resistance of man being vain against him, and the conspiring of princes and hostile people serving only to render his name more celebrated, as he had foretold by his prophets. Is there any thing in the history even of religion, which bears more clearly the character of the spirit of God, and which evinces more faith, more piety, more readiness to suffer every thing for the truth?—And I may add, more gravity, a persuasion more enlightened, and a conduct in every respect, more strictly right and judicious.

Disordered minds cannot accord long either with others, or with themselves. But the apostles varied neither in their plan, nor in their conduct : They adhered to what their master had taught them ; none of them departed from the
rule

rule prescribed them ; none belied himself ; and for many years we see them walking to the end in the same path ; holding the same language ; writing the same things ; acting on the same principle.—No variation, no contradiction ;—where do we see visionaries, keeping within such bounds, and observing the same uniformity ?

We know what is the language of fanatics ; fallies which have sometimes some beauty and brilliancy, but in general mixed up with a heap of extravagant and obscure things. No precision, no order, no correctness of thought.—All confused,—with abundance of words, often unintelligible,—sometimes a false sublime, void of sense ; sometimes a low and puerile manner ; but always *hyperbolic* in their expressions, as in their thoughts. But is this the language of the apostles ? Happily we have their own writings, by which we are enabled to judge ; and this is not the least of the benefits we derive from having the *original books*. Among these writings, there are some which are purely *historical* ; where we find a narration that is clear and simple, without any of those irregular movements, those extravagant eulogiums, or those digressions which always escape from enthusiasts. They relate the death of their master ; his resurrection ; his ascension ;—every thing that was great and interesting in him, without any endeavour to obviate difficulties, or captivate men's minds ; as if confident, that the little they said would suffice to establish the truth in all succeeding ages. And with what fanatic shall we find

find a moderation like that of the evangelists, from whom there does not escape a single exclamation, not the least invective, neither against the traitor Judas, nor against the Jews, nor against the rulers of that nation? When St. Peter proposed to elect another apostle in the place of Judas, it seems at that time allowable for him to have used harsh language, yet St. Peter only says, that having bought a field with the money which he got for his crime, he fell headlong, and was gone to his place. We see also that St. Luke who speaks of the violent persecution of the Christians by Herod Agrippa, mentions only his death, though the manner of it was singular enough to be regarded even by the Jews, according to Josephus, as a chastisement from Heaven. What was more natural to an enthusiast than to exclaim at such a chastisement as the consequence of the persecution? And yet St. Luke says not a word; and in general, neither he nor the other evangelists mix any thing in their narration which favours of declamation or passion; because in fact the object of these historians was solely, to perform the office of witnesses to posterity; and because a witness ought to content himself with relating facts clearly and simply; a sort of discretion and reserve, of which fanatical minds are incapable.

The other pieces which compose the new Testament, are *letters*; where we find as much richness and animation, as there is of simplicity in the historical part. But this animation is well employed, when the object is to *console and*

exhort, has nothing in it of enthusiasm. It is the *energy*, which a *strong persuasion* naturally gives to discourse. It is the same sort of energy, which we look for in every good Christian; who in speaking on the subjects of his faith and his salvation, *cannot speak coldly*. "An imagination, says Croufaz, which is disturbed and heats itself, may indeed produce animation, but certainly never correctness." But here the reflections are just, and perfectly suited to times, to place, to persons, and circumstances. The character of *letters* is perfectly well preserved. They contain answers to questions proposed;—addresses suited to those to whom they are written; mixed with affectionate sentiments, and *continual repetitions* of the great principles of christianity, which are to *direct and support us in all the occurrences of life*. Every age, every station, finds there, lessons and consolations, which are suited to them. What can be more interesting than the manner, in which St. Peter and St. Paul describe the greatness of the mercies of God, and of his promises; the efficacy of the gospel; and the obligation we are under to purify ourselves for so noble a service? What can be wiser, than the *detail of morals*, into which these two apostles enter, as well as St. James and St. John? What more judicious, than the directions which St. Paul gives to his two disciples, Titus and Timothy, upon the duties of a good pastor; upon the nature of true devotion; upon forbearance and charity; and upon the government of the church.

Most

Most fanatics have a violent and dangerous spirit, which leads them to sow doctrines of independence and sedition. But we know with what care, the apostles inculcate *submission to authority*; and how little their conduct or doctrine led to the least disturbance.

I acknowledge, that in the epistles, *as in all such writings*, we find passages which want explanations, and require at least, that we should know on what occasion, and on what subject, these letters have been written. Every language and every age having its own taste and style; and every author making allusions to the events, the opinions, and the customs of his time and his country; in order to understand ancient writers, we require to have *historical remarks*, which may inform us of these customs and events; together with such critical notes, as may supply what is omitted, and enable us better to understand the object and connexion of the discourse. With such assistance, we do not find more difficulty in the letters of the apostles, than in every other writing *of the same sort*. The style is even more clear, than that of many works in high estimation; and the more we study them, we certainly find more of their solidity and connexion. Very different from those fanatical writings which have nothing but the false glare of pompous disorder; very different even from a number of works, too much infected with a false philosophy or a puerile rhetoric.—It is a fact which many persons have undoubtedly experienced, that after having read

many books upon the subject of religion, both ancient and modern, and heard discourses of every kind; they return at length with singular pleasure to the apostolic writings, as the best beyond comparison both in sense and taste*.

If

* Should not this be understood, with an exception to such of the *opinions and reasonings* of the writers of the new Testament, as are *obscure*,—to their quotations from the old Testament, when they do not *illustrate*,—to their language when it is *indeterminate*;—what for instance is the precise import of the terms, *beginning* and *word*, in the introduction of St. John's gospel? And unless their sense be *definite and clear*, nothing can be built upon them; and the famous verses of the first epistle of St. John, after all, are they quite intelligible?—In the opinion of Dr. Campbell, “St. John's gospel bears marks more signal than any of them, that it is the work of an illiterate Jew, and that there is none whose manner more bespeaks an author, destitute of the advantages which result from letters and education.”

There seem also to be some *popular additions*, the natural effect of the facts being *orally related*, and *by many*, for a considerable time, before they were put in writing;—of which, the account of the *temptation*, by Matthew and Luke, may possibly be one; all but the fact of Christ withdrawing into a solitary place immediately after his baptism and before he entered on his great errand, as it is related by Mark, who is said to have had his information from St. Peter.

The language about calling out devils, seems also to represent the *popular notions* of the times, with respect to some violent distemper.

There have been *interpolations* too, of which the 52 and 53 verses of the xxvii. chap. of St. Matthew's gospel may possibly be one; the extraordinary circumstance being
mentioned

If it be objected that the Apocalypse is a book full of singularities not intelligible; besides that this objection regards only one portion

mentioned there, in the most *cursor*y manner—with an air of amplification—and by St. Matthew *alone*; who wrote his gospel, Dr. Campbell says, in Hebrew for the use of the Jewish Christians, and that it was first *corrupted and interpolated* among them, and afterwards disappeared.

“ St. Paul received heavenly gifts in an *earthen vessel*,—his education at the feet of Gamaliel, and the general taste of his countrymen, obliged him to deal in far fetched extravagant figures, which as that taste subsided, lost all resemblance with the things signified, but were understood *literally*, thereby leading men quite wide of his meaning, involving them in useless subtilties, inextricable difficulties, and endless disputes.” *Ab. Tucker.*

“ By far the greater part of the controversies, by which Christian churches have suffered themselves to be divided are of an *interminable* nature; the appeal in many of them being made to writers, whose commission is limited, and did not perhaps extend so far; and who being in possession by divine vouchsafement and revelation, of some few general and interesting ideas concerning the life, character, and resurrection of Christ; the necessity of repentance; certainty of pardon; and of a future state and judgment; were left, except in some particular and extraordinary cases, to speak of them and represent them very much in their own way, and agreeable to their respective educations, natural temperament and turns of mind; which seem in fact to have been very different.—And why then, if this may have been the case, pursue with so much zeal and earnestness, some of the more minute and nicer questions in theology, and seek the answer to them, where in all probability it is not to be found; and from writers who might not perhaps to cases of such a sort be quite competent.”

Amner.

“ I lament, says an eminent prelate, that the scriptures

tion of the books, and does not apply to the others, it is enough to observe, that one part of this book contains instructions which are clear; and excellent exhortations; and that in order to judge of the other part which consists of prophetic visions, we should have the key.--Supposing that the predictions regarded the approaching ruin of Jerusalem, and the events which belonged to it, as Grotius and other learned men have conjectured; it is easy to see why the writer should not be too explicit, and that there was great occasion for employing allegory. But if this allegory regards the future fortunes of the church, as other theologians have believed, we easily conceive that God might have reason in his wisdom, for determining that the prophecies should continue obscure, until their accomplishment. However this may be, it appears at least that this allegorical part has something that is regular and connected, which does not belong to a mind that is disordered: And if we should see
this

are so much disregarded, and of course misunderstood; that many of our clergy unmindful of the solemn engagement at their ordination, do not devote their time to the study of them; and while human learning is making a rapid progress in its various branches, the religion of Jesus is almost every where *overwhelmed* by human formularies and systems.—Christianity can never have its free course among men of improved understandings, or even among rational creatures in general; while gross misrepresentations of it, are substituted in the place of the simple original.”

Archbp. Newcome's Observations, &c.

this piece aside as being too obscure, equity requires at least that we *suspend* our judgment upon it; benefiting always by what is clear, without meddling with that which remains doubtful.

On the whole it appears, as I have before observed, that the great mass of doctrine which we gather from the new Testament, is both *worthy of God*, and perfectly *suitèd to the nature of man*; and that there is no system, which unites so much sublimity, and so many grand truths for the *conduct and consolation of human life*. Which cannot but make us think that it is the work of divine wisdom*. If unbelievers will see nothing in it, but what is human, they must allow however that its morality is excellent,—founded on the best principles,—confined within just limits,—fortified by powerful motives,—and suitèd to all ranks of men.—But *this circumstance alone* is sufficient to silence those, who would venture to say that it is the work of *weak persons*.

(It

* It would be presumptuous to say that the Supreme Being could not have effected his purpose in any other way than that which he has chosen; but as the revelation of the divine will is attended with some doubts and difficulties; and as our reason points out to us the *strongest objections* to a revelation, which would force *immediate, implicit, universal belief*: we have surely just cause to think that these doubts and difficulties are no argument against the divine origin of the Scriptures: And that the *species of evidence* which they possess is best suitèd to the *improvement of the human faculties* and the *moral melioration* of mankind.

Essay on Population.

(It is said the poet Sophocles, charged with being superannuated, thought the best way to repel the charge was to compose a tragedy, and read it to his judges; indeed it was the best plea he could make; we admire in it to this day the force of his genius; and the accusation was utterly confounded.)

Will it be said that there needs no other mark of their fanaticism, than their having *believed and related*, the extraordinary and almost incredible things, they have done;—it was thus Festus judged, before whom St. Paul appeared. For when the apostle related events perfectly strange to a Pagan, the Roman governor did, *as all superficial men do*, who hear things spoken of, which are contrary to their prejudices, and who are not disposed to be at the trouble of examining them;—their first thoughts reject every thing that is not immediately agreeable to them; and if their little minds are of a rank accustomed to take a decisive tone, their mode of pronouncing their opinion will partake of it—*Paul*, says Festus, *you talk wildly, much learning has made you mad*;—but what is the apostle's answer? He repels the charge in a manner equally firm and respectful, like a man who is conscious that he knows well what he says;—calling to witness king Agrippa, who was present, and who as a Jew, was better informed of what had passed in Judea: “*I am not mad,*” *most noble Festus*, said he, *but speak the words of truth and soberness. For the king*
“*knoweth*”

“ knoweth of these things, before whom also I
 “ speak freely: For I am persuaded that none
 “ of these things are hidden from him; for this
 “ thing was not done in a corner.” And indeed,
 to treat as *extravagant*, every allegation of a
miraculous fact, is deciding very rashly; as such
 facts are neither contradictory, nor impossible
 to God; and as they enter naturally and *necessarily*
 into the plan of a divine revelation. I allow
 that it would be folly to believe them without
 proof; and if we were sure too, that they were
 fables, we should have reason to distrust the
 judgment of those who said they had seen them.
 But till that should be decided, we are not at
 liberty to say, without further enquiry, that all
 those who believe they have seen such things
 are, for that belief alone, dotards and mad-
 men.—We require to have other proofs that
 they are so, and that other circumstances accom-
 panying their testimony, should indicate some
 disorder of mind.—“ Supposing, says Crœusaz,
 “ a man becomes visionary, it is not possible
 “ but that every thing he teaches must have
 “ some mark of his troubled and deranged
 “ mind.—He will be confused, extravagant, fall
 “ into superfluities, and into useless errors; his
 “ ideas will contradict each other, and we
 “ shall find him differing from himself in many
 “ respects. Nothing of this sort is to be seen
 “ in the apostles; every thing in them marks a
 “ sober understanding, and a mind in its natu-
 “ ral state. There is in reality nothing extra-
 “ ordinary in their writings, but the facts them-
 I “ selves,

“ selves, of which they say they have been wit-
 “ nesses. For the rest, nothing is more natu-
 “ ral than the manner in which they speak of
 “ them, and the conduct which they observe
 “ in consequence; and they bear their testimony
 “ to these miraculous facts, as they would do
 “ to every other fact; they report them, be-
 “ cause it has pleased God that they should
 “ see them; but as they have seen them with
 “ the same *natural faculties*, by which they
 “ saw every thing else, *they report them in the*
 “ *same simple manner*; and nothing they say
 “ with respect to them, partakes at all either
 “ of confusion or disorder.”

So far from it, that the *very nature* of the
 miracles they speak of, is a proof of a sound
 and well regulated judgment; they are such
 as a disordered mind would not have *con-*
ceived; perfectly adapted to the subject and
 confined to it.—For what is it the apostles re-
 late of their master? No prodigy to satisfy a
 vain curiosity; no instance of caprice; no in-
 congruity.—In general Jesus Christ employs his
 power in the cure of diseases, which is an act
 of charity worthy of the christian morality. His
 resurrection, corresponds with the promise of
 one day raising us also; as his ascension is the
 most proper proof he could give, that we also shall
 be removed to Heaven.—The miraculous gifts
 communicated to the apostles, were necessary
 for the commission they received, to go and
 instruct

instruct all nations; and served to make them *attended* to as their master was*; to shew in all places the consequences of his exaltation; and to *certify this fact* to those, who had not been witnesses of it. Thus, of all we read in the evangelical history that is extraordinary, nothing is useless, nothing foreign to the subject. They are facts *connected with the nature of the doctrine, and which serve to uphold every part of it*, in the fittest and best manner; very different from the strange fictions of fanatics, when they attempt to impose.

In fine, these facts, alledged by the apostles, are so far from bearing the marks of fanaticism, that they are best calculated for removing all suspicion of it.—Ordinary fanatics who say they

I 2

are

* The striking necessity of general laws *for the formation of intellect*, will not in any respect be contradicted by one or two exceptions, and these evidently not intended, for partial purposes, but calculated to operate upon a great part of mankind *and through many ages*. Upon the idea I have given of the formation of mind, the infringement of the general laws of nature by a divine revelation, will appear in the light of the immediate hand of God, mixing new ingredients in the mighty mass, suited to the particular state of the process, and calculated to give rise to a new and powerful train of impressions, tending to purify, exalt and improve the human mind. The miracles that accompanied these revelations, when they had once excited the attention of men, and rendered it a matter of most interesting discussion, whether the doctrine was from God or man, had performed their part; and these communications of the divine will, were afterwards left to make their way by *their own intrinsic excellence*, and by operating as *moral motives*, gradually to influence and improve, and *not overpower and stagnate* the faculties of man.

are inspired, rest their pretensions on *internal* emotions, visions, and other pretended signs of inspiration, which have no *external* proof; and in confining themselves to this sort of *secret* signs, in which the imagination may be most concerned; nothing is more easy than to impose on themselves and others.—But this is not the case with *external proofs*, which consist of a series of facts, *visible and palpable*; and which our own senses, and the senses of others can examine distinctly and repeatedly. This kind of proof cannot deceive; for to err and be mistaken totally, with respect to these, a man must not only be an enthusiast, he must, as I have said, be perfectly visionary and a fool. An excess so uncommon and striking, that the infirmity must be notorious by a hundred marks of weakness.

And this doubtless is the reason, that it has pleased God, that the faith of the apostles, *on which ours depends*, should not be founded solely on secret and internal inspiration; but upon *external facts*, existing, and easy to discern.—It was requisite that they should *see* Jesus raised again, and ascending to Heaven; and that they should themselves perform miraculous cures; that they might never be confounded with enthusiasts, who have no other proof of their inspiration, than what they feel, or think they feel inwardly. We see that there is nothing of this sort to apprehend, with respect to the apostles, as they had in proof of their mission, palpable signs, which manifested themselves by means of senses, the least subject to illusion or equivocation.

CHAP. VII.

*That the Founders of the Christian Religion were
Persons of eminent Virtue.*

A THIRD point, which it imports us to examine, is the *manners* of those who have founded the christian religion.—Have they been ambitious? Have they led a sensual and irregular life? Or do we discover in them, that spirit of intrigue, and those passions, which have been the secret springs of so many enterprises? If it were so, I confess we should have a right to distrust them, and it would not be natural to believe, that God had put his word into the mouths of such.

But to speak first of the master;—where is there so fine a character?—I do not speak of the qualities which we admire in the heroes of the world, qualities more brilliant than substantial, and often as false in their principles, as dangerous in their effects. The inquiry is about the *real virtues*, that should belong to a teacher of religion; those virtues which are true and solid; good in all times; of universal account; and which are the produce of the most enlightened piety.

The

The scripture calls Jesus Christ, the just, which is a great encomium in one word, at least in the sense in which this title is given. It is said also of him, that he was exposed to temptations as we are, but that he hath not committed sin—that there was no fault in him; neither was deceit found in his mouth; that from his birth he has been holy, innocent, undefiled, separate from sinners; all this in fact appears, in the whole course of his life.—Innocence and purity of manners; temperance; justice; mildness; goodness; disinterestedness; patience carried to the highest degree; above all, an entire devotedness to God, and an ardent zeal for the salvation of men; such are the ingredients which compose his character.

That which is most to be admired in the regular and correct life of Jesus Christ, is not simply his having been chaste, sober, void of all sensuality; which is uncommon to that degree however among men; but it is yet more uncommon, to have like him manners so pure, and yet without any austerity; for his character had nothing in it, that was at all gloomy or severe. He not only used as others do, the necessaries of life, but he partook of its innocent recreations; we know that he attended marriages, where he was invited; and it happened to him more than once, to meet at feasts with persons of different sorts, which drew upon him from the rigid pharisees, the reproach of mixing with publicans, and men of bad life. But he himself explains clearly the
reason

reason of such condescension, by saying that the physician frequents and does not avoid the sick. In addressing himself to men of vicious life, he observes that decorum and reserve that became him; yet seeking occasions to do them good, and give them useful instructions. The rules and scruples of the pharisees, stopt them at trifles: Our Lord on the contrary, gives us by his example, the true rule of temperance; which consists in using *with moderation* all things which God allows for the service of life; acknowledging his goodness, and employing them in order to be better enabled to fulfil its duties.

They who resist gross vices, open their hearts to the seduction of the *subtiler ones*, those of avarice or ambition. But of these also we find not the smallest trace, in the life of Jesus Christ. Poor without being forced to be so, he remained tranquil in poverty; and spoke of riches with that superiority and indifference, which suited his sublime temper. The same disinterestedness which he recommended to his disciples, he practised himself more strictly than he required it of them. With a little ambition he might have made his way to the great; taken part with some of the sects; had influence with the popular factions, or have found other means of raising and enriching himself. But far from having any such thoughts, he continued contentedly in a very limited state. He censures equally the sadducees and pharisees and scribes, without seeking to ingratiate himself with any.

In

In mixing with the common people he is careful not to sow the seeds of sedition, which was then stirring in the country: His first discourse, tends on the contrary to calm men's minds, and to encourage pacific dispositions. He refuses to erect himself into a judge, between those who addressed him to decide between them. He tells them to render to Cæsar what belongs to Cæsar and to God what belongs to God. He conceals himself, and withdraws; when a headlong multitude think to make him a king. He declares that he is come not to be ministered to but to minister, and that the kingdom of the Messiah is *not a temporal kingdom*. He labours to banish from the minds of his apostles every idea of worldly dominion or resistance to authority. And when they came to seize him (in the garden of Gethsemane,) instead of suffering the zeal of St. Peter who drew a sword, he restrains it, and delivers himself voluntarily, into the hands of those who were leading him to punishment.

Jesus Christ has been styled a teacher of charity. He is truly so, by the nature of his precepts, so repeated and so urgent on this subject; but he is not less so by his own example. His life abounds in instances, which denote a heart truly humane and compassionate, and animated with universal benevolence.—To heal the sick,—to console the afflicted,—to instruct the ignorant,—to comfort the unhappy,—to go about doing good,—to communicate the gospel to the poor and the low,—such were his occupations. Hence he is represented under the image of a
good

good shepherd, who seeks the sheep that are lost.—Even his miracles are no less acts of goodness than of power. Often is he seen indulging affections with his disciples, as with faithful friends. He repels nobody; very different from the pharisees, who shewed a haughty contempt for the samaritans, and for all those, whom they were pleased to call sinners, he conversed with these sinners, and invited them to repentance. His charity embraced the samaritan, equally with the Jew, the infidel with the believer. Whenever he instructs or reproveth, with what mildness does he do it? It is only to the *hypocritical devotee*, that he is unaccommodating; the pride of these men requiring to be humbled, and because they could not perceive the nature of their conduct, without strong censures.

But however admirable may be this *beneficent* charity, we must own that it is less rare and less difficult to practise, than the charity which *bears and forgives*; the human heart grows confident and self-complacent in doing right, but feels itself hurt and degraded, when it is to suffer injuries. Hence this degree of virtue is seldom seen among devotees and sages; but it is seen in the highest degree, in the person of Jesus Christ. A little town having shut its gates against him, the first sentiment of some of his disciples was, that their master should call down fire from Heaven upon them: But he reproveth this bitter zeal, "You know
 " not, says he, of what spirit ye are; the Son of
 " Man is not come to destroy men but to save
 K " them."

“ *them.*” The spirit of Christ is neither vindictive nor persecuting. If the true spirit of Jesus Christ reigned on Earth, we should see only gentleness, and mutual assistance among men.—He knew well, the unjust treatment he was to receive at Jerusalem, yet in approaching this city for the last time, he melted and wept; not for himself, but for the calamities which the Jews were bringing upon themselves.—When Judas led on the armed men to seize him, and dared to approach him with a kiss, what severe reproaches might not so perfidious a man expect? Yet Jesus contents himself with saying to him with a mildness capable of penetrating any heart but his own, “ Is it thus, that “ you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?”—However shocking was the precipitation and iniquity of his judges against him, neither complaints nor invectives escape him. When the soldiers ill treated him, he was silent; he suffered himself to be led as a lamb to the slaughter, and underwent his punishment, a punishment slow and grievous, without murmur, without shewing the least resentment against his persecutors. So far from it, he lamented only their errors, he prayed for them, and one of his last sighs was for favour to them, “ *Father,* “ says he, *forgive them they know not what “ they do.*”

A patience so admirable, was not in him the effect of insensibility; he saw perfectly every thing that was unjust and barbarous in the conduct of his adversaries; neither did he regard without emotion, the approaches of death;
hence

hence arose his first sentiment, so conformable to nature “ *Father if it be possible let this cup pass from me!*” But this sentiment is soon corrected by another which his piety suggests— “ *Yet not mine, but thy will be done*” He feels every thing that it is natural to feel, in so sad a situation. He does not brave death, but resigns himself to it. He seeks not to exhibit a haughty courage, in order to catch those applauses, which gratify vanity for what it suffers in so ignominious a situation; but he dies with humility, submitting himself to the will of God; he dies in charity, regarding the good he was to obtain for men “ I came from the Father and am come into the world, now I leave the world and return to the Father” this was the motive of his constancy and tranquillity.— It is certain, the more we weigh all the circumstances, in the account of his death, though it is written with *the greatest simplicity*, the more we discover that every circumstance of it, has the character of innocence and humility, *joined to real magnanimity*; which has made a modern writer observe, that even to speak humanly, and without any regard to sentiments inspired by faith; there is nothing so great; so interesting; so sublime; so affecting; as the death of Jesus Christ.

But if we recur to the *principle* of so many virtues; we shall see they are derived from the *love of God*, and from piety, the purest and most ardent. To do the will of God in preference to every thing—and to act always from

superior views; distinguish *this great teacher*, from the sages of the Earth.—To be devoted to God,—united to God—to have God only in view,—to refer all actions to him—to please him in every thing;—this doubtless is the true character of a teacher from Heaven.—Now such is the *proper and distinguishing* character of Jesus Christ; and whereas the philosophers speak little of God, and of the means of pleasing him; Jesus Christ brings all back to this great foundation: It is always his zeal to serve God, which animates him; hence arises his indignation at seeing the temple profaned—“To do the will of him that sent him, and to finish his work”—this is his food;—his discourses tend only to raise men from earthly to heavenly things: *He sees every thing in its relation to God*; and the connexions even of blood, are of little account with him, in comparison with the attachments, which arise from piety. *Do you know, said he, whom I call my nearest relations? They are those who do the will of my Father, who is in Heaven.*—To advance the kingdom of God, and the spiritual good of men; to these purposes he devotes himself; and is solely occupied in them.

I ask now, when we would endeavour to *conceive* a character, worthy of being a messenger from God; whether we can form any other idea than of such a one; and whether in human life, there ever was any thing seen, more divine? When we examine closely those who are called heroes in the world, we often find only false virtues. There are philosophers whom we
praise

praise and with reason; and yet we observe them generally influenced by a vain glory; their lives are not exempt from blame; and after all, one does not see that their virtue has been put to severe trials. The history of the church also, furnishes us with bright examples; and yet except that of our master, there are none that deserve to be followed in every thing; the most devout have had their faults. We observe even among pious persons, as among most of the philosophers, some singularity which discovers caprice and humour, not to say more. But where do we see any thing of this sort in the model, we have been contemplating.

One instance more, shall finish the imperfect sketch we have endeavoured to draw of the virtues of Jesus Christ: It is that a character of *simplicity* reigns through the whole of it. His piety, as we have observed, has nothing whimsical, nothing intractable. It is a piety, that is gentle, and sociable; full of mercy and good fruits; as St. James expresses it. He does not seek to distinguish himself by his mode of life, or external appearance: He lives in the world accommodating himself to the innocent customs of the times and places, in which he lived: Instead of seeking for what is striking and extraordinary in matter of devotion, he has chosen rather to shew us how we ought to act *in common life*; and to leave us an example of the piety; the rectitude; the patience; and the gentleness; with which we ought to speak and
act

act on every occasion. Even the firmness he has shewn, has nothing in it of the arrogance of the stoic; the fastidious virtues, are not his virtues; his life is exempt from all parade; and as on the one hand, certain devotees think it has not enough of those austerities which impose; men of the world on the other, find nothing in it that is brilliant. But what grandeur it has, in the eyes of those, who recognize *true virtue and true wisdom!*—he has not sought to be admired; he has sought only to do good; and it is for *that* he is to be most admired.

CHAP. VIII.

Of the Piety and Sanctity of the Apostles.

WE are not to expect to find in the disciples, so complete a model, as we have in the master. They had their weaknesses; and some of them committed even great faults; but they were the first to acknowledge them, and to humble themselves under them: And by that, as well as by their other virtues, what esteem do they not merit from equitable judges?

Before they were called to be apostles, it appears that in general they were men without reproach, according to the law of the Jews.
But

But how did they differ from themselves, when after being trained in the school of Jesus Christ, they were commissioned to go and teach all nations! It is then, that we see the disciples walking in the steps of their master, and becoming really the imitators of his virtues, as well as the heralds of his doctrine: We see these teachers of mankind, supporting by their conduct the purity of their lessons: The benevolence of Jesus Christ took possession of *their* minds. Without ambition, without attachment to worldly things, their ardour was directed wholly to heavenly things: Animated by an unwearied zeal to spread truth, and make men love it; entirely devoted to God and their duty; full of courage in the midst of contempt and persecution; blessing God amidst their greatest labours; and rejoicing within themselves, for having been found worthy of suffering in so noble a cause.

Their humility appears in their writings. Concerning things the most extraordinary, they content themselves with a *simple and modest recital*; saying only what is sufficient for religious purposes, but nothing to gratify curiosity or vanity: They never think of giving themselves importance. Eusebius remarks, “ that
 “ it is St. Matthew himself, who informs us
 “ that he was a publican: That St. Mark
 “ writing according to the information of St.
 “ Peter, passes in silence the testimony of
 “ Christ.” “ Thou art Peter and on this rock
 “ I will build my church;” “ but he forgets not
 “ to

“ to relate the cowardice of this apostle in
 “ denying his master ; he is silent on what is
 “ for his honour, but not on what reflects
 “ dishonour upon him. St. John always speaks
 “ of himself in modest terms ; such instances
 “ are not insignificant, they shew to what a de-
 “ gree these men were superior to self-love, and
 “ with what simplicity of heart they have writ-
 “ ten.”

It is in the same spirit of ingenuousness
 that they report their weaknesses ; their indis-
 creet pretensions ; their slowness of belief ;
 and other things of this nature, which we
 should never have known, if they had not had
 the good faith to relate them ; so much did
 the *love of truth* prevail with them, over every
 other consideration. The manner in which he
 denied his master was undoubtedly a great stain
 in the life of St. Peter, and yet he has taken
 so little precaution about it, that all the four
 evangelists have mentioned it, without omit-
 ting any of the most aggravating circumstan-
 ces. St. Peter has not only suffered with
 humility the relation of this fact, but what
 efforts did he afterwards make to repair his
 fault ? What firmness in being first to
 proclaim the gospel in the midst of Jerusa-
 lem ! what dignity in the manner in which
 he presents himself before all the people, and
 afterwards before the rulers, *to attest the re-
 surrection of Jesus Christ !* how firm, and at
 the same time how respectful is the answer he
 gives to the Sanhedrin, “ Judge yourselves,
 “ whether

" whether it be right to obey men rather than " God!" how disinterested is the manner in which he rejects the offer of Simon Magus, and the veneration, carried too far, of Cornelius who threw himself on his knees before him; on every occasion we see him speaking and acting as a man full of faith and zeal. Read his epistles; they are the language of piety the most pure. He exhorts the Christians to make known the virtues of him, who has called them out of *darkness into light*;—to guard against carnal passions, which war against the soul;—to edify their adversaries by a conduct without reproach;—to honour all their superiors;—to love one another with an affection pure and unfeigned;—to be holy as he, who hath called them, is holy;—In reading these exhortations who can entertain a doubt that they proceed from a piety the most ardent and sincere.

The same thing appears in the writings of St. John;—a heart that is upright, tender, disinterested, full of that gentleness and benevolence, which he so much inculcates; all his expressions partake of it, charity guides his pen; he refers every thing to practice; according to him, there is no true love of God but that which shews itself in a holy life and love of our neighbour—he inculcates these sentiments incessantly, and in a manner so affecting, that one sees he is in fact describing himself, and *laying open the state of his own mind.*

The little we know of St. James exhibits also an apostle worthy of Christ. In his epistle appear marks of great wisdom, mildness, humility; detachment from worldly things; solicitude to make men comprehend, that faith is inseparable from good works; that hearing the word of God without practice is nothing; and that temperance, and charity are of the *essence of christianity*. This it is, according to him which constitutes pure and undefiled religion; he acknowledges no true devotion, but that which makes us *just and beneficent*.

But let us dwell a little longer on the character of St. Paul; he, of all the apostles, who is most known to us, and by whom, we shall be better able to judge of the others. St. Paul, first a pharisee, zealous for his sect, and most violent in persecuting the Christians; becomes on a sudden a convert. How should this change happen, if not from a love of truth superior to every thing else, superior even to what is most hard to conquer, *prepossession and the shame of change*: He renounces however both his prejudices, and the esteem he had acquired with his party. From being a persecutor, he becomes persecuted. He goes from Judæa into the cities of Asia and Greece, even to Rome, and perhaps into Spain and Gaul; sometimes at liberty, sometimes a prisoner; not without many dangers and labours both by sea and land; threatened and often treated as a criminal. The love of Christ however supports him through every thing; and in every thing he exhibits a character
of

of humility, justice, temperance, faith, and hope. What he teaches is, that God ordains that all men in all places, should be converted, and that on this condition and in his mercy, he receives us into his favour through Jesus Christ; he has the courage to announce this truth, in the synagogues of the Jews, and in the assemblies of the Gentiles; exhorting them too at the same time boldly, to abandon the worship of vain idols, and to honour the one, living, and true God. He attacks more openly than any philosopher had done, both the magic and the superstitions, the most authorized at that time. How striking it is, to see him led before the tribunal of Felix, in chains, and yet making the governor tremble, by reasoning before him of justice, of temperance, and of a future judgment! how engaging, to see him reject with indignation the divine honours, which the Lycaonians would have paid him on account of a miraculous cure which he had performed; and laying hold of this proper occasion, to shew them the folly and sin of idolatry, even in the presence of the priests of the idols! but while he shews such firmness on the one hand, we see him addressing the faithful, with all possible mildness and tenderness. What are we to think too, of the candour with which he acknowledges his own weaknesses, and attributes every thing good that he has done, entirely to the grace of God?—The smallest acknowledgment he might expect from the churches was, that they should afford him subsistence: But to keep back every pretence of blame, and not to be burdensome to

any, he chuses rather to work with his own hands, and preach the gospel without charge.—Considering his vocation as a combat and a trial, he compares himself to the Athletics who led a rigid and frugal life to fit them for their severe exercises: *“ Every man, says he, that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we, an incorruptible. And therefore I keep my body under, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected.”* In fine, what can be more instructive than to see the tranquillity with which he expects his death; attached to the world only, by the desire of being yet useful in it. *“ For which cause, says he, we faint not: But though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”* On this foundation it is that he speaks to his disciple Timothy, with an effusion of heart full of faith and of zeal, *“ I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead when he shall appear in his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all patience and perseverance. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but having itching ears will*

“ will get themselves teachers according to their
 “ own liking; and they shall turn away their ears
 “ from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.
 “ But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions,
 “ do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of
 “ thy ministry. For I am now ready to be offer-
 “ ed, and the time of my departure is at hand.
 “ I have fought a good fight, I have finished my
 “ course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth
 “ there is laid up for me a crown of righteous-
 “ ness, which the Lord the righteous Judge, shall
 “ give me at that day: And not to me only, but
 “ unto all them also that love his appearing.”

Let us chuse among the ancient philosophers whom we please, in order to make comparison with the apostles: I am not afraid to say, that we shall not find one of them, entitled to near the same esteem as they are; whether for the grandeur of their sentiments; the purity of their manners; or their zeal to combat error and diffuse truth. Whatever praises we may give to Socrates, to Plato, or to Cicero; we know that they were not entirely free from reproach. Seneca was the cotemporary of St. Paul, and the most renowned of the sages of that time; yet what comparison is there between the two men? Seneca was not perfectly cured of his desire of riches and honour. He appears always a man of vain glory, and fond of the reputation of fine talents. The counsels of wisdom which he gives with a refined and ostentatious air, are not to be compared to the solidity of the precepts of the apostles. If Seneca possessed sound notions on religious subjects, what

use

use has he made of them? Do we find that he combated idolatry, and the other errors of his time? Though much in favour at the court of Agrippina and Nero, had he the courage to speak to them, of justice, and temperance, as St. Paul did, in irons, to Felix and Drusilla. Those who are acquainted with the history of that time, know that Seneca was reproached for *courtly accommodations*, little worthy of a senator and philosopher. But to say truth, these reproaches did not belong to him alone. It had been long complained of, that the name of *philosopher* was dishonoured by most of those who bore it; hence this observation of Minutius Felix, “ that
 “ they never were more in the right, than in
 “ what they said in disparagement and reproach
 “ of one another” Cicero had before complained of them *Tusc. Quest. B. 2d.*—“ Where is
 “ the philosopher, said he, whose life is re-
 “ lated as it ought to be? Where is the phi-
 “ losopher who does not employ his knowledge
 “ in vain ostentation, rather than in correcting
 “ his own conduct? Is there one of them, who
 “ takes for his own use, the precepts which
 “ he gives to others? Some are so light, and so
 “ vain, that it would have been better for them
 “ had they learnt nothing. Others hunt after
 “ sordid gains; there are some too, who are
 “ under the dominion of pride and ambition.
 “ Many are the vile slaves of voluptuousness,
 “ and all belie shamefully their profession by
 “ their conduct.”

These

These are reproaches which we are not afraid of being made against those whom we call *our masters in christian philosophy*. Their lives suited perfectly with their precepts, and answered so well to the sanctity of their vocation, that we may say boldly to Christians, “Imitate them in all things, above all, the master, whose example is a rule not less correct, and perfect, than his lessons.”

There are men whom we call *great*. This title is not deserved, except when extraordinary virtue and fortitude are employed for the service of men. But in that view, how many heroes sink, or whose heroism at least is reduced to almost nothing!—to reform inveterate abuses; to destroy gross and pernicious errors; to establish true principles of religion and morality; to give the world salutary instruction; to render it durable by forming disciples to perpetuate such instruction;—by purity of manners, to make it appear how efficacious this instruction is, for the purification of man; and to devote himself totally to this great object, even to the sacrificing to it every thing that is dear; fortune, repose, and life itself; this without doubt is *the noblest and truest heroism*. But where is it to be found? I find it in the highest degree in the founders of the christian religion; but elsewhere I see nothing that approaches to it.

CHAP. IX.

Of the Consequences to be drawn from this 3d Part.

FROM the account we have given of the character and virtues of Jesus Christ and his apostles, a high degree of esteem and veneration at least, is undoubtedly due to them. It is a tribute naturally due to all those, in whom we perceive good intentions and eminent qualities; and it would be very strange, that in doing justice, as we have done, to so many great men, who have not however been *faultless*; we should be less equitable towards those, who have so much surpassed them. The life of Jesus Christ in particular, being so perfect in purity and holiness, we should be rather disposed to acknowledge something in it *more than human*; as humanity alone does not appear to be capable of such perfection.

But if we be not disposed to go so far; at least we ought to be far from entertaining the odious suspicions of *fraud*, which infidelity attempts to throw on persons so respectable. Doth the same fountain send forth at the same time, sweet water and bitter, says St. James;—and our Saviour thus rebutes those who calumniated him; “ either say that the tree is good
“ and

“ and its fruit good, or say that it is bad and
 “ its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit.”

The suspicion of fraud, would in this case be so much the more flagrant, as it imports a charge against Jesus Christ and his apostles; not merely of having suffered falsities to be believed; or of having given currency to some fiction of little consequence, as certain politicians may have done, but what is infinitely worse, of being the authors of a *most extraordinary imposture*; and of having formed a project, which if it were founded in fable would be perfectly *wicked and impious*. For if any one should make the same pretensions falsely; which Jesus has made, by saying like him, that he was the promised Messiah; the Son of God; the Saviour of men; attributing to himself the right of judging the world; pardoning sins; the power of working miracles; of rising from the dead; and of ascending into Heaven; supposing, I say, all this to be false, what are we to think of such imposture? Would it be simply what is called (though improperly) a pious fraud? It is plain that it would be a much greater crime. It would be sacrilege, and an execrable profanation; especially according to the law of the Jews, which containing the revealed will of God, would render much more culpable any one, who should dare to violate his rights. To impiety towards God, would be added a strange malignity towards men; by attempting to deceive them in the most important concern in the world; *divine worship and the means*

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of

of salvation.—But it is always useful, it will be said, to teach good morals. That is true; but Jesus Christ has done more; he has abolished the ceremonial law of the Jews; he has announced *expressly* a divine œconomy, for the remission of sins under certain conditions; he has given positive promises of grace and salvation; he has threatened with the greatest evils, those who reject them; he has required that the minds of men should be *fixed upon him*: Upon his death; and upon his doctrine; *as upon the appointed means* of redemption, in exclusion of every other. If all this be false, is it not an imposition upon men in the most essential article, that which concerns the state of the soul, and their eternal happiness.

And what can be so perfectly strange, as to suppose any one teaching and practising the most correct morals, and this for upholding an imposture; and supporting to the last (for the sake too of persuading men in the most forcible manner, to shun impiety and falsehood) a character of the most daring falsehood, and most determined impiety? What should be the motive to induce a *deceiver* to advance the glory of God at all events? And while he tramples truth under foot, and sports with things the most sacred, what is to lead him to promote the empire of virtue? Was ever so unnatural a contrast conceived, a mixture so incomprehensible as this, of zeal and profanation, of benevolence and hypocrisy?

Nay

Nay more. Our Saviour did not expect to be listened to without contradiction. He declares himself, that he shall give offence to many; that he shall be persecuted and put to death; that his doctrine shall cause great troubles; that it will divide families; and bring a sword upon the Earth; that it will bring on a dreadful catastrophe upon the nation that will reject him; and that those who shall believe in him, far from being gainers in this world, will have their portion in crosses and tribulations. Foreseeing this, he yet endeavours to draw to him, those of his own nation, most distinguished for their piety. If this were to deceive them, how perfidious! if knowingly and willingly, he leads them like lambs to slaughter, what inhumanity! he always shewed affection to his apostles, and in reward of their zeal what does he do? sports with them in the most cruel manner, by engaging them in a project, of which the inevitable consequence is to bring them to a miserable end. St. John was his beloved disciple, and his zeal led him to follow his master to the foot of his cross, where he remained pierced with grief. 'Then at least, was it not time to undeceive him, and in these last moments, what reason had he to leave him yet in error; as this error too would be a fatal one? The wickedest of men think themselves obliged not to implicate their friends in a crime, when neither they nor themselves can any longer be gainers by it. How are we to think then that Jesus from the cross, should yet be desirous of confirming his beloved disciple in the be-

lief he had inspired him with, if all had been
 deceit? Is it to be imagined, that to his last
 breath, he wished to fan the fire which he
 had kindled on the Earth; and that, dying
 himself as a malefactor, he should persist wan-
 tonly, in drawing into the same gulph, so many
 worthy persons; and even his best friends,
 who had quitted all to follow him? Let us
 look into history; among all the examples of
 imposture, we shall never find one, accompa-
 nied with circumstances so black and odious
 as these. This however is the abominable part
 we are to impute to Jesus Christ, if we call in
 question *his sincerity*. For it is not allowed us
 to say, that he has only employed an excusable
 artifice. We must charge him directly, with
 being impious, and a blasphemer; a perfidious
 and cruel master; a man who has made a mock-
 ery of whatever is most sacred; and who has
 carried malice and imposition, to a length be-
 yond all example. I do not write this, without
 trembling; but it is necessary, in order to per-
 ceive the excess of injustice, and the horrid ex-
 treme, to which the suspicions of the unbeliever
 lead, if we chuse to give ear to them.

It would be the same with respect to the
 apostles, if we entertain distrust of them; for
 as they could not first be deceived concerning
 the *long course of facts*, which they say they had
 seen with their own eyes; if there should be
fraud, they are the authors or accomplices;
 and good God, of what kind of fraud?—one, that
 militates against the principles of their religion;
 against

against their own interest; against the honour of their nation; and against common charity; exposing thereby infinite numbers both of their own, and avertimes, to be the victims of a chimera, from which they have themselves derived no advantage!—St. Paul was aware of the consequences of his doctrine, and how far he was involved in publishing it, “*If Christ be not risen, says he, then do we preach in vain, and ye believe in vain; yea and we are found false witnesses of God, for we have testified of God that he raised up Jesus Christ.*”—He saw clearly that evils only and afflictions were to await those, who embraced this faith; if then it was a falsehood, why seduce and involve those whose welfare was so dear to him; to what end hold this pressing language to Timothy, “*But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long suffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, which came upon me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall become worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of; knowing of whom thou hast learned them.*”

Thus spoke all the apostles in order to inculcate and confirm more and more, what they had taught. In reading such exhortations, where every thing marks the *lively and deep impression*

impression which the objects had made upon them; is it possible to conceive that they speak *against their consciences*; and that by the blackest perfidy, they think only to deceive those to whom they write in this manner? What! these same men, whose discourses and conduct breathe nothing but piety, integrity, gentleness, and the purest charity; shall they be transformed into wretches and cheats of the worst kind? how strange the supposition and what a paradox! and yet there is no other alternative; if we entertain suspicions of fraud here, we must go on to these extremities, and digest all the consequences of them. It is to be hoped that the just horror we must conceive of this, will be sufficient to restrain those, who have not lost every sentiment of equity and modesty. An able writer* having cited many passages from the letters of the apostles similar to that just cited, and in which one sees a *fulness of belief* that can come only from the heart, makes this reflection “ One
 “ can add nothing to these expressions, full of a
 “ divine ardour, which do not persuade merely
 “ but *animate* him who reads them; and which
 “ cover with ignominy and shame, those who
 “ knowing nothing of St. Paul nor of the other
 “ apostles, are so unhappy as to suspect them
 “ of artifice and deceit.”

* Du Guet.

CHAP. X.

1th Fact.—That Jesus Christ and his Apostles had no external Advantages, which confer Distinction and Authority in the World.

IF on the one hand it be necessary, that the authors of a religion, in order to be distinguished from visionaries and fanatics, should appear in every thing men of sense, and whose natural faculties have not been disturbed; on the other hand however, we are not to expect that they should be men of sublime genius or of eminent knowledge; lest indeed, they should be thought capable of having *themselves invent- ed* what they teach; and of having made it agreeable to others, by the ascendant which able men know how to assume over the minds of others. The same reason makes it desirable also, that they who first give birth to matters of faith, or establish a religion to be considered as from Heaven, should neither be potentates nor great statesmen, nor belong to a body of teachers who have *acquired authority*. Human qualities too brilliant, would prevent us from *distinguishing sufficiently the hand of God*.—Who then are the persons most proper to serve as the instruments of God? Without prescribing

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to his sovereign wisdom, or excluding any of the means that he shall think proper to employ, it seems that a revelation can never appear more clearly to be what it is, than in the mouths of *plain men*; who are in possession of all their natural good sense; but are neither orators; nor philosophers; nor great men; nor persons engaged in the intrigues of the world; in a word, who having *common sense*, but divested of all power and credit; should by that circumstance itself, be superior to all suspicion, of having formed such a design themselves, or of being able to execute it.

Now this mediocrity with respect both to *talents* and *station*, so proper to banish distrust; is one of the qualities which we observe in the founders of christianity.

With respect to country, we know that Jesus Christ and his apostles were *Jews*, a nation then in subjection and despised; and which would give them much less advantage than if they had been *Greek or Roman*: yet in many respects it seems right and natural, the people of Israel, being the only one, which had preserved the worship of the true God in the midst of an idolatrous world; that from this same race the restorers of true piety should also come. And if God has thought fit to shew us, that a true knowledge of himself, is *rather a gift from his hand, than the produce of human efforts*, it seemed suitable, that it should come from a country little renowned on the score of science, and favoured only in matters of religion.

Jesus

Jesus born in a country which made so inconsiderable a figure in the world, held no rank even among his own countrymen; besides his passing for a Galilean, (of which country it was said in contempt as a proverb, "has any prophet ever come out of Galilee") he was regarded also as of *low extraction*; for though he was descended from the family of David, this family was at that time so sunk, that it was confounded with the common people, as we may judge by the occupation of Joseph the husband of Mary. Jesus partook of their low and poor condition, and lived with them in obscurity to the age of thirty years: It is wondered at, that the evangelists tell us nothing of his life during all that time; it is because Christians are not properly interested but in what Jesus has done as a messenger from God, and the Messiah: The rest is indifferent.

Jesus born in so humble a station, did not use the means which they do, who think to raise themselves; nor did he take any part (his principle indeed opposed it) in the factions which were then on foot in Judea. Neither did he frequent the places, where learning (another mode of advancement) was to be gained; or cultivate the studies which they do, who wish to succeed that way; for though he had the title of master and teacher, it was less a public title which he had acquired by his talents, than a particular mark of esteem, which the admirers of his wisdom gave him; a sort of wisdom very different from that which shines in the world;

it was neither that of philosophy, according to the taste of the Greeks; nor of erudition or rhetoric. It was not even a knowledge in the traditions, upon which the scribes and doctors of the law valued themselves so much: We have seen also that he had neither an air of austerity, nor that sort of vehement and pathetic language, which imposes on the multitude: It was a wisdom of gentleness and simplicity, not striking to those who stop at the exterior; so that to judge of it by human appearances, nobody seemed less fit than he, to make a figure on the great theatre of the world, and to become a teacher revered in all places.

His apostles were not of a rank more elevated; we know that they were of the common people, chiefly Galileans; getting their livelihood by fishing or some other trade; of course without means or credit. When our Saviour called them to him, they were of mature age; accustomed to labour; men not likely to feel ambition, or be excited to enterprise, as they had not led an unsettled and turbulent life, nor were pressed by any distress. A mechanical profession, joined to a life, uniform and tranquil as theirs was, is a state which by providing for the subsistence of man, is more fitted than any other, to limit his views and keep temptations at a distance: And thus we see, that the apostles had not themselves any other desire, than to remain in that first sort of life, to which habit as well as necessity had attached them.

With

With respect to their understandings, we have seen already in what rank we should place them. With *plain common sense*, they had received education enough to enable them at least to read, write, and reason pertinently, on the common concerns of life. They possessed also a competent knowledge of the scriptures of the old Testament; having learnt it from their infancy, as every good Israelite was obliged to do; and here was enough to distinguish them from perfectly gross and weak men; but, for the rest, they were neither profound and subtile geniuses; nor eloquent in language; nor polished writers; nor versed in philosophy or other liberal sciences.

The only one amongst them, who could be considered as a man of letters, was St. Paul; educated at the feet of Gamaliel; of the sect of pharisees. But the sort of ability which *he* possessed, was of no great use to him among the *Greeks and Romans*, to whom his preaching was principally directed. Different talents were looked for in *their* countries,—rhetoric, philosophy, and elegant literature only were in request; and hence St. Paul himself makes this confession to the Corinthians. “*And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.*” And in another place he acknowledges his inability in point of elocution, at the same time that he is not afraid of asserting, that with respect to the matters themselves, he had received divine light:

“ *But though I be rude in speech, says he, yet not
 “ in knowledge ; but we have been thoroughly
 “ made manifest among you in all things.*”

The timidity, which St. Paul confesses he himself felt, would be yet greater in the other apostles, who were his inferiors on the score of study and experience : And in fact we observe that at first, the least thing disconcerted them. When they saw their master arrested all of them fled, except St. Peter who shewed more courage at first, only to belie it shamefully afterwards. They trembled at thinking that they should be called to appear before the tribunals, and to speak in public ; thinking they should be incapable of acquitting themselves well, and even their enemies thought in the same manner of them : For when Peter and John appeared before the Sanhedrin, their judges were astonished to see that they were men without learning, and of the common people. We know also with what contempt Celsus and Julian affected to treat them, calling the master a *Galilean*, and the disciples wretched watermen and *poor fools*, The most disdainful epithets have not been spared, and that, *with a view of reflecting back on their doctrine*, the contempt, which was thrown on their persons. But is this a just consequence ? we will proceed to examine it.

CHAP. XI.

What is the Consequence to be drawn from this fourth Part.

MIGHT it not be said to those who dare to insult thus, *the low condition and unpolished exterior* of the founders of the christian religion, “ you are not aware of what you say ; all you “ assert, makes against you ; the more you dis- “ parage their understanding, the more it will “ appear, that they could not *naturally* form “ such a design, as that of changing the re- “ ligions of the world ; that naturally and of “ *themselves*, they could not invent a body of “ doctrine, such as that which we have seen ; “ and that naturally they were *not in a state*, “ to make this doctrine be received and relished, “ with so much success as it has been ; and if “ all this exceeded their powers, what follows “ from thence, but that they possessed a power “ greater than their own, and from Heaven.”

I say first,—That it could hardly enter into the minds of men of this condition, to erect themselves into the leaders of a sect, and to attempt some great revolution in the world, without any near view of temporal advantage. Plans of this kind belong only to superior men, who
have

have large views ; or to those refined politicians, who seek to cement their authority by religious establishments ; or to those unquiet minds, who in an age of daring folly, finding themselves without resource, and piqued at some check in their ambition ; project great schemes for their advancement. But that artificers—of understandings suited to their condition,—of mature age,—contented in their station,—who had never known any thing but their mechanical occupations—and who had neither support from the people, nor access to the great,—that men of this sort, I say, should form without an object, a great plan of imposture, very difficult to conduct and support ; *of this we shall find no example in all history.*

The thing would be less surprising, if the plan in question had been formed *by degrees* ; and that on engaging in it, the whole of its extent and consequences had not been foreseen ; but this was not the case with respect to Jesus Christ ; for, (as we have observed) as soon as he appeared in public, he did not hesitate to say, that he was sent from God ; he proved this by miracles ; he spoke too of his death,—of his resurrection,—the glory to which he should be raised,—the persecutions his apostles were to suffer,—of the destruction of Jerusalem,—and of the conversion of the Gentiles. All this, we collect clearly from the whole of his discourses. There was a plan formed all at once, and so connected, that no part could be separated.—As to the apostles, it might be, that they did not comprehend

prehend at first, all they were called to do; and yet they soon discovered that Jesus was the Messiah, and that the principal men of their nation were hostile to him; their Master did not cease to apprise them, that he should be rejected,—that his followers would have to suffer like himself great persecutions—and *that all their hopes rested on a life to come*. He informed them afterwards that their vocation was, to proclaim the gospel in all places, and to bear witness of the resurrection of their Master; then at least, the whole system was laid open to them. They then saw clearly, the nature of their office, and were at liberty to relinquish it. The undertaking had not yet devolved upon them, they were engaged only as far as they chose, nothing hindered them from returning to their prior condition; nothing compelled them to enter into a career so new; nor to engage in an enterprise which hereafter must be their own work; and to which it must always appear to them, that their own powers were unequal.

2d.—If it was difficult to form such designs, what ability did it require to carry them on?—to arrange all the parts,—to prepare all the means,—to do every thing at the proper time,—to say neither too much nor too little,—to act always in concert, and be guilty of no inconsistency? Whenever men of low condition and limited powers venture to form plans, we see that they are ill conceived and ill digested, formed on low principles and narrow views. If some of the circumstances are happy,
they

they are ill supported and ill connected; and the weak parts always prevailed. Every thing conceived by such understandings, is involved in *matter*; and they are objects of sense alone which govern. Whereas, what is it we see in the gospel? a doctrine totally detached from sense,—a renunciation of every low and carnal interest,—views that are elevated, and turned entirely to spiritual things—in a word a *sublime theology, and the purest morality*: And this doctrine so excellent in itself, is announced constantly and uniformly; with simplicity and energy; without art and yet with prudence.—And this, regarding it merely as a human project, would certainly be a very difficult part to sustain, and of which persons, most perfectly versed in the affairs of the world, would hardly be capable; how then are we to attribute it to men, whom we reproach with being *rude and ignorant*?—Mr. Werenfels has this reflection on the subject. “It is natural if we see a child say or
“ write any thing much above its capacity, to
“ suppose that it has been taught by somebody
“ wiser than itself; if the child acknowledges
“ it, and in fact we discern the character and
“ understanding of the teacher; *what was pro-*
“ *bable becomes certain*; we no longer doubt
“ that all he has said, has been suggested and
“ taught him; let us apply this.—It is cer-
“ tain that what our sacred authors have writ-
“ ten, concerns things of a sublime nature,
“ and much above their capacities, considering
“ them only as they were in themselves; the
“ just and sound manner in which they speak
of

“ of God,—of his attributes,—of the sovereign
 “ good,—of the foundations and rules of mo-
 “ rality—surpasses so much, all that the best
 “ philosophy has produced; that the more en-
 “ lightened part of the world has decidedly pre-
 “ ferred *their* lessons, to those of all the ancient
 “ sages. It is asked, whence they had this su-
 “ perior knowledge? They themselves say, they
 “ received it from Heaven; in which they are
 “ much to be credited, as they teach nothing
 “ which is not worthy of God. They would
 “ undoubtedly have been much less to be credit-
 “ ed, if they had said that they derived it from
 “ their own fund; for how should they have
 “ been able to go so far, they, who with a very
 “ limited understanding had no tincture of sci-
 “ ence; nor any intercourse with the teachers
 “ of it.”

3d.—But if such a plan was naturally be-
 yond their comprehension, the execution of it
 was not less out of their power; it will doubt-
 less be acknowledged, that to consider the apostles
 in themselves, there never were men who ap-
 peared more naturally to be destined, whether
 from their *limited understandings* or *the lowness*
of their condition, to continue always obscure
 and unknown in the world; but it is *that cir-*
cumstance of itself, which made them most fit to
 be the *instruments of God*. An ancient author*
 reasoning on the words of Jesus Christ “ ye are
 “ the light of the world”—observes how sin-
 gular it is, that such a title should be given, to
 whom? To fishers, to poor and mean men:—

O

And

* Eusebius of Cæsarea,

And yet the event has shewn, contrary to all expectation, that they have perfectly fulfilled this title. When therefore we hear the Pagan authors speak with so much contempt of the first teachers of the christian religion, have we not a right to hold this language to them “ you tell us a very singular thing. How
 “ should it be, that these men whom you think
 “ so contemptible, have done more than all the
 “ sages you so much admire? That they have
 “ done more than you, Celsus, who pique your-
 “ self on being a subtle philosopher; more than
 “ you, Julian, a great politician, a great genius,
 “ and a powerful emperor: These vile fisher-
 “ men, these toll-gatherers, have established the
 “ worship of the true God, while you continue
 “ still the blind partisans of idolatry:—They
 “ have abolished *magic*, on which you so ridi-
 “ culously employ your studies:—They have
 “ done more in the article of *manners*, and for
 “ the good of society, than the most celebrated
 “ legislators.—Without power, and without ta-
 “ lents, they have overturned that *paganism*
 “ which you endeavour in vain to restore; they
 “ have established, they have made triumphant,
 “ *that pure and holy religion*, which all your
 “ arts, and all your authority cannot subdue.”

Such is the advantage which we derive at this day, from that *incapacity* and that *weakness* with which the apostles were so much reproached. Let us judge from thence, whether it were to be wished, as many have imagined, that the gospel had been promulgated by persons of a
 MORE

more elevated rank, and of greater erudition; for such is the weakness of men, that they wish for splendor and pomp, even in religion. But if it had been so, unbelievers would now be the first to take advantage of it; by asserting that it was *not necessary to look for other causes* of the introduction of christianity, than the knowledge, the authority, the eloquence, the ability, of those who have been concerned in it; in a word, that it is an institution, *within the compass of human powers*. And this it is, which divine wisdom, so superior to our views, has been pleased to prevent; by chusing instruments, precisely such, as to make the *intervention of God, clearly discernible*; and to remove in *all succeeding ages*, the dangerous suspicion, that humanity had too great a part in the work. St. Paul remarks this, when he says to the Corinthians, “ of ourselves we are not capable of thinking thus, but our sufficiency is of God.” And again, “ we have this treasure in *earthen vessels*, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” Great indeed, says St. Chrysostom, must have been the power that could raise at once, men of low degree and without study, to the knowledge of a celestial philosophy.” The same teacher, (who carries this reflection further in his homilies upon the first epistle to the Corinthians) relates that he one day heard a singular dispute on this subject, between a Greek, who maintained that St. Paul was much inferior to Plato in genius and eloquence, and a Christian who by a mistaken zeal undertook to support on

the contrary that St. Paul was more acute and knowing, “ both one and the other, says he, defended the position, which least suited him ; for “ it belonged to the Christian, to allow the natural inferiority of the apostle ; whereas the Greek would have found his account better in “ magnifying his eloquence and knowledge.”

This remark serves also to account for a matter which surprises and offends some, in reading the new Testament. It seems to them that a doctrine from Heaven, ought to have been proposed with all the sublimity and magnificence, of which human language is susceptible ; Whereas our sacred writers, say they, discover little art, little eloquence, and little delicacy in style ; we even find in them some inaccuracies.

It is true, that the language of the authors of the new Testament is not that of correct grammarians, nor skilful rhetoricians, nor of polished writers. But it is clear and forcible ; it says distinctly, what it means to say ; and contains strong sense under phrases, which are common, and artlessly arranged. And is it not with reason, that such books should be thus written, both that they may be more *popular*, and *within reach of all men*, and that we may thereby attend more to the *things themselves*, than to the harmony and elegance of the diction ; and also that there should remain a certain proof, that the apostles *were in their natural state* ? For supposing these writings, had for
their

their elegance, been comparable to those of Plato and Cicero, what would have been the consequence? We should have thought, either that the apostles were in themselves geniuses of the first rank, or that these writings did not come from them; but that it was some more able hand which had fabricated them, under their name: And one or other of these opinions, supported by such an appearance, would have shaken not a little, the foundation of our faith. But these two causes of distrust are perfectly dissipated, by our seeing that they are works without art; and without ornament, the authors of which, have been visibly such as we describe them: And therefore it is, that God, *by whose aid they were in possession of the facts,* and who might also have endowed them with words to make them eloquent writers, has not thought proper to do so; but has left them with respect to language, to their native simplicity; intending thus, that all ages should have an *abiding proof*, that they were indeed *unlettered men*, who have founded the christian religion.—On one side then, we observe in their writings the stamp of divine wisdom, by the *excellency of the things* they taught; on the other, we perceive the man, the unlettered man, by his *common and incorrect style*. This contrast produced the effect intended. It is still “the treasure, put in earthen vessels,” to enable us to distinguish, as well what comes from God, as what is the effect of human weakness.

CHAP. XII.

3th Fact.—That the Founders of Christianity passed and ended their Lives in Poverty, Humiliation, and Suffering.

THERE remains yet one point to examine, and that is, what advantages Jesus Christ and his apostles have derived from the enterprise they formed. If they have raised themselves in the world and been enriched; if they have been enabled to take vengeance on their enemies, and obtain for themselves an agreeable life; we may then suspect that human motives have influenced them, as others, to cover their designs under the cloak of religion. The raising of himself, for example, which Mahomet aimed at, was enough to excite distrust. We see a man who refusing himself nothing in point of indulgence, listens also to ambition; and puts himself at the head of a party which places him on a throne, where he dies a natural death: The character of prophet which he assumed, served him too well, in his projects, for us not to believe that it was taken up with that design.

How

How different is *his* history from that of the founders of christianity! Far from seeing in it the least trace of human grandeur, it exhibits only poverty, weakness, and a renunciation of all worldly honours. Our Lord says of himself, "that he is come not to be ministered to, but to minister,—that he has not where to lay his head,—and that his kingdom is not of this world." Though in a low condition, he would have been able at least to have enjoyed repose; but he renounced it, devoting himself to a painful life, which exposed him to the contradiction, the calūmny, the contempt and hatred of the great; from which at length he experienced the worst effects. Though one part of the people appeared to admire him, we see that a great part was always ready from blind prejudice to oppose him; while the pharisees and priests watched all his steps, and were continually laying snares for him. They put an ill construction on his most innocent actions, and did not cease to decry him as a dangerous man. They corrupted one of his disciples to betray him. In fine he was arrested as a seditious man, and a blasphemer, and proceeded against with the most violent animosity; every outrage was practised against him, every indignity, which an unbridled populace could invent; and that nothing might be wanting to the opprobrium with which he was loaded, they joined with him two criminals, convicted of capital offences. His punishment was that of the cross, the slowest and most ignominious of any in use, the common punishment of fugitive slaves,

slaves, and wretches of the lowest order. Such was the produce of *his* enterprise, which Jesus received, with respect to this world.

The disciples were not better treated than their master. Soon after his departure, Peter and John were put in prison, and severely threatened by the Sanhedrin. After that Stephen was stoned, and James beheaded in Jerusalem. The Sanhedrin not content with thus treating those they had in their power, wrote to all parts, to excite against them the chiefs of the synagogues in other countries; and these did not fail in their turn to accuse the apostles even before the Pagans, charging them with being disturbers of the public peace, an accusation too hastily listened to and which always brought some outrage on the church. We may judge of the troubles which all the apostles had to encounter, by those of St. Paul whose history is known to us. Into whatever place he went, he found the hatred of the Jews had been beforehand with him: Frequently was he brought before the tribunals, or exposed to popular commotions; on his return to Jerusalem he was near being torn to pieces by the populace. He was delivered from this danger only to be conducted a prisoner to Rome, where he continued near two years in bonds.—He has himself given an account of his sufferings

“ *I have been, says he, to the Corinthians, often*
 “ *in danger of death. Of the Jews five times*
 “ *received I forty stripes save one: Thrice was*
 “ *I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I*
 “ *suffered*

“ *suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have*
 “ *been in the deep ; in journeyings often, in perils*
 “ *of water, in perils of robbers, in perils by*
 “ *mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen,*
 “ *in perils in the city, in perils in the wilder-*
 “ *ness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false*
 “ *brethren ; in weariness and painfulness, in*
 “ *watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings*
 “ *often, in cold and nakedness : Beside those things*
 “ *that are without, that which cometh upon me*
 “ *daily, the care of all the churches.”*

But when he speaks thus, he was not at the end of his labours ; for in continuing them, he was again brought to Rome, where he was beheaded under the Emperor Nero. St. Peter about the same time was crucified. St. James, surnamed Minor, was stoned. The lot of the other apostles was not much different. After many oppositions and outrages both from Jews and Pagans, after having been often put in irons, most of them ended their days, by suffering the last punishment.

It must be confessed, that if all this had come upon them contrary to their will and expectations, we could conclude nothing in their favour ; we should say, that having looked for some advantage from their enterprise, they had been mistaken in their views. But we see that neither the master nor the disciples, had ever any other expectation than this. Jesus Christ speaks to his apostles of his sufferings, as of a thing that was necessary, and suited

to the end of his coming.—“ *And he began to*
 “ *teach them, says St. Mark, that the Son of Man*
 “ *must suffer many things, and be rejected of the*
 “ *elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes,*
 “ *and be killed, and after three days rise again.*”

And when St. Peter from inconsiderate affection deprecated such an event, Jesus rebuked him for entering not into the views of God, but only into those of men. And then our Lord takes occasion to say to his disciples “ *whoever*
 “ *will come after me, let him deny himself, and*
 “ *take up his cross and follow me.*”—He often compares himself to a shepherd who gives his life for his sheep; he declares that he is not come to be served but to serve, even to the giving his life a ransom for men; he expected with such certainty, a violent and ignominious death, that he foretold almost all the circumstances of it; and beforehand consecrated a memorial of it in the Eucharist; and that at a time, when he was at liberty to avoid it. “ *Now*
 “ *said he, is my soul troubled and what shall I*
 “ *say? Father save me from this hour? But*
 “ *yet it is for this hour that I am come.*”

He had not concealed from his apostles that they should suffer like him: “ *If the world hate*
 “ *you, he had said to them, ye know that it hated*
 “ *me before it hated you. If ye were of the*
 “ *world, the world would love its own: But be-*
 “ *cause ye are not of the world, but I have chosen*
 “ *you out of the world, therefore the world hateth*
 “ *you. Remember the word that I said unto you,*
 “ *the servant is not greater than his Lord. If*
 “ *they*

“ they have persecuted me, they will also persecute
 “ you: And all these things will they do unto
 “ you for my name’s sake, because they know
 “ not him that sent me. These things have
 “ I spoken unto you, that ye should not be of-
 “ fended; they shall put ye out of the synagogues,
 “ yea the time cometh that whosoever killeth you
 “ will think he doth God service.

The apostles therefore were not surprised at
 the crosses they met with. They were pre-
 pared for every thing, and comprehended clear-
 ly that their calling was, to walk in the same
 thorny and difficult road, which their master
 had walked in before them. “ I now rejoice
 “ in the sufferings which I endure for you, says
 “ St. Paul to the Colossians, and fill up that
 “ which remains of the afflictions of Christ in my
 “ flesh, for his body’s sake which is the church;
 “ whereof I am made a minister according to the
 “ dispensation of God, which is given to me for
 “ you, to fulfil the word of God.—Preaching
 “ Christ, warning every man and teaching every
 “ man in all wisdom, that we may present every
 “ man perfect in Jesus Christ, whereunto I also
 “ labour striving according to his power which
 “ worketh in me mightily. Even unto this pre-
 “ sent hour, says he to the Corinthians, we both
 “ hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buf-
 “ feted, and have no certain dwelling place; and
 “ labour, working with our own hands; being re-
 “ viled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it:

*" Being defamed, we entreat : We are made as
 " the filth of the world, and are the refuse of all
 " things unto this day."*

The other apostles witness no less their resignation ; and fail not to apprise the Christians of their time, that the same portion was to await them. I will cite only these words of St. Peter, *" Beloved, think it not strange concerning
 " the fiery trial which is to try you, as though
 " some strange thing happened unto you : But re-
 " joice, in as much as ye are partakers of Christ's
 " sufferings ; that, when his glory shall be re-
 " vealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.
 " If ye be reproached for the name of Christ,
 " happy are ye ; for the spirit of glory and of
 " God resteth upon you : On their part he is evil
 " spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But
 " let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a
 " thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a meddler in
 " other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as
 " Christian, let him not be ashamed ; but let him
 " glorify God on this behalf."* I leave it now to be determined, whether a plan of life such as this, a life poor and abject ; filled with sufferings and insults ; sufferings foreseen, and insults which might have been avoided, and which ended in a tragical death ; I leave it to be determined whether this could ever be a plan, which impostors would propose to themselves : For after all imposture must have an object. The more we renounce all recompence from God and all fear of his judgments ; the more eagerly we seek for recompence among men, by securing the possession

possession of some advantage in the present life, We seek for riches and honours and pleasures. These are wanting to satisfy humanity, *and more so, when man loses his way so much, as to renounce the promises of religion.* For what other reward than temporal prosperity can enter into the account, in the system of a false prophet? Instead of which, we see an entire detachment from all earthly views; a determined design to suffer and to die; to suffer not only sorrows, and the most humiliating mortifications; but to die with ignominy. And is this natural? Does it enter into the mind of man, unless he be urged on, and supported by a confirmed faith, and by a love of truth perfectly pure and sincere?

We do not think ourselves allowed to charge with ill faith many persons, who however are not capable of such sacrifices; we presume charitably, that there may be rectitude and piety even where zeal shrinks, and will not carry them so far: What shall we say then, in seeing the extraordinary disinterestedness of which we have been speaking? In seeing Jesus and his apostles prepared to be the first martyrs of their doctrine, and in fact becoming such? Can the suspicions of infidelity hold out against a proof so unequivocal? And what do we require to assure us of the probity of a teacher, or the faithfulness of a friend, if such attestations be not sufficient. It is seldom we have those which are so much to be relied on; but when we have, would it not be the most unjust thing in the world to remain

main still distrustful? After a person has uniformly inculcated virtue, and practised it during his whole life; if withal he suffers and dies, to maintain his sentiments; I cannot see how his *sincerity* can still be suspected. Nothing surely remains but to admire and be silent. We may believe if we please, that he is in an error, but we cannot doubt his good faith, which is too well established. What praises do we bestow on those of the Pagans in whom we see signs of such magnanimity? Ought we to use two weights and two measures,

CHAP. XIII,

LET us now unite in one view, the five articles we have touched on, respecting the *character and life of the founders of the christian religion*. We shall see that all of them concur in verifying their *divine mission*.

There is nothing we have remarked concerning the state and character of Jesus Christ and his apostles, which does not suit and clearly correspond, with the idea of *messengers from God*; and with the plan of a revelation. For though at first, one might wish perhaps to find more splendor in the founders of this religion; it will appear however, every thing well considered

sidered, that the interests of religion, and the necessity of laying firm foundations, *required* that things should be in this respect, precisely on the footing we find them.

For first, as we have observed, a divine revelation should not be announced, as a *species of philosophy*, in which we are seeking truth in the dark, and with much reasoning and conjecture; on the contrary it should speak to us *positively and with authority*, on the part of God—and it is in this manner that Jesus Christ and his apostles have acted.

2d.—We ought to see in these teachers, a *sober and discreet state of mind*; that there may be no suspicion of their having been *fanatics or visionaries*; and happily there remains to us, writings of the apostles, and a *detail* of the life and discourses of Jesus Christ, sufficient to establish this second characteristic required.

3d.—It is requisite that their lives should be without blame; and that their *manners* should not contradict, the *sanctity of the morals* they inculcate. This is absolutely necessary to obtain our esteem and confidence; as we cannot readily believe that impure men should be the instruments of the Deity. Now we have seen, that virtue more pure,—proofs of piety more unequivocal, are no where to be found, than in the life of Jesus Christ and his first disciples.

4th.—It is desirable also, we say, at the same time, that those who announce a divine revelation, exhibit

exhibit a turn of mind, which is thoughtful and judicious; this natural good sense should not be embellished by *science, or refinement, or eloquence*; least we should be led to believe, that human skill has had too great a share in the work.—Still less would it be fitting, that the founders of a religion should be men of *power and in high repute*: It is easy to see what suspicions would arise, from the *credit and authority* with which a sect should be established. But this fear is perfectly removed by what has been already remarked, of the little external advantages or imposing qualities, which are to be found with the authors of christianity.

Lastly, 'Though it seems strange that the ministers of God, worthy of all respect, should be exposed to the insults and the persecutions of wicked men; it is for the benefit however of *all succeeding ages*, that they have endured humiliations and sufferings, capable of convincing all the world, that no low and interested motive has entered into their conduct; but that it was in truth, an ardour the most pure, which directed them. Now we have seen that such has indeed been the life of Jesus Christ and his first disciples, real martyrs to the truths which they delivered.

I know not whether the reader recollects the portrait we mentioned, which Plato has given of a person, truly worthy of being chosen for the *interpreter of the Gods*. It is composed of the principal features we have taken notice
of

of, and particularly the last, that of being despised and treated as *guilty though innocent*, which he considers as the most eminent mark of virtue, and the best distinction of a messenger from Heaven. Taking Plato then for the judge, I ask whether in putting together all the circumstances we have remarked in the person, and in the life of Jesus Christ and of his apostles, we do not find precisely that *set and suitableness* of qualities we are in search of? Can we believe that it is *by accident*, that all these qualities are found here united? Or ought we not to be much struck, with seeing them so happily united?

Besides there being the most desirable combination of *qualities* that we can wish for, in persons honoured with a divine mission; *the facts stated*, go to the removal of every doubt we can entertain concerning the character of Jesus Christ and his apostles. For, as we have observed, the unbeliever must take one of these three parts—he must either say, that they were men of integrity who taught sound doctrine, *but without attributing to themselves a divine mission*, or any thing supernatural; though posterity by a blind devotion has improperly given them credit for this.—Or that they were men of weak and visionary minds, *who have indeed believed, but without reason*, all that they tell us;—or lastly, that they were *impostors*, who sought to deceive the world, without being themselves deceived.—Take it on what side we will, if we would deny the truth of the christian faith, we must necessarily go upon one of these three suppositions.

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But

But which of them shall we take? The choice, to say truth, embarrasses unbelievers not a little. They rather wish not to declare *decidedly*; nor to determine for one or other of these hypotheses. It is *more convenient*, not to be confined, but to be at liberty to speak of the authors of christianity, sometimes in one way, and sometimes in another; considering them to-day as visionaries,—to-morrow as seducers,—and at another time praising them as good men, and blaming only the excess of veneration which has been shown them. Unbelievers often mix all these ideas together; and without confining themselves to any, they would have us understand that *all of them* are possible; endeavouring thus to screen themselves by generalities.—This might be allowed, if we were talking of persons, whose lives and doctrine were very imperfectly known to us. We might then say, that not having *positive facts*, nor a history *sufficiently detailed*, we were at a loss what judgment to form.—But we have seen that in this case, there is a portion of history well known; and on which we have vouchers and documents, as full as on any other part of ancient history the best established. From thence it is, that we have collected the five facts reported above; and these facts are to be explained and *their causes assigned*.—We have a right to press the unbeliever on these points, and he cannot elude the argument by invasions. Forced to give an answer, he will endeavour to maintain first, that Jesus Christ and his apostles have not attributed to themselves any thing supernatural.—But the
contrary

contrary appears evidently by the first fact which we have stated ;—if he then recurs to the second hypothesis, and represents Christ and his apostles as weak enthusiasts, we have likewise shewn that this is not maintainable.—There remains then only one suspicion more to hazard, which is to accuse them of fraud and malice. But can this suspicion hold out against what has been said of their sound piety ; their charity ; patience ; disinterestedness ; the lowness of their condition ; the mediocrity of their talents ; their conduct so distant from worldly intrigues ; and lastly, the sufferings by which their integrity has been put to the last trial ?

What Means then remain, to connect the five facts we have laid down, and to obtain *the true key* to all this history ? there are no other, than to acknowledge, that Jesus Christ and his apostles have indeed spoken the truth, and have *really had* a divine mission. This hypothesis (in which there is nothing but what is natural in the design, so worthy of God, of *giving to men a revelation, and opening to them the way of salvation,*) is the only one which *reconciles every thing*, and explains that, which is otherwise inexplicable.

I have before observed, that we sometimes escape by *vague discourse*, and while we have the liberty of declaiming and *talking loosely* : But when we come to examine things strictly and are obliged to speak *with precision*, it then turns out, that the systems which have been hazarded, have no solidity, and vanish into air.

CHAP. XIV.

Reflections on the Force of the Proofs, which have been employed.

WE shall perceive better, the *force* of these proofs, if we recollect what has been before said, that there are rules in the *moral order of things*, to judge of men by their conduct; as there are in the *natural order of things*, to judge of causes by their effects. Humanity has, so to speak, *her constant and uniform course*, in consequence of which, we never see men acting against their natural constitution, nor against all their interests present and future. We do not see parents, unless they be out of their senses, endeavouring to hurt their children. We do *not* see men so wicked or so foolish, as to be bent on doing wrong, without deriving either pleasure or profit from it. We do not see, that a man without virtue, either comprehends or desires to support to the end, a disinterested and virtuous part; nor an epicurean expose himself cheerfully to all kinds of difficulty. Experience has enabled us to see, that every one follows his inclinations and his principles, and that it is uncommon for a man to belie himself for any length
of

of time. Hence it is, that if we hear of any disorderly conduct, nobody thinks of attributing it to a grave and sensible man; the suspicion does not fall on any person, who till then has lived without reproach. Hence it happens too, that in courts of justice we reckon much, on what a witness deposes *against his own interest*; and advocates do not fail to dwell on the improbability that a man has, or has not done such a thing, his character and the circumstances he is in, considered. This reasoning is founded on certain rules which good sense and constant experience dictate, in order to judge of human actions: And hence arises what is called *moral certainty*, upon which the whole order of civil life depends. In what a situation should we be, if we could not reckon upon men's acting according to their natural temper, according to their principles, or according to their interest; in a word, that they acted from some reason or motive, by which humanity may be taken hold of.—There are indeed *moral exceptions*, but which we *exclude*, as we do physical exceptions,

Now it is to *admit* and *not to exclude* these exceptions, if we say, as unbelievers are forced to do in this case,

1st.—That certain poor mechanics of Judea, without education, and without talents; have
formed

formed *of themselves*, the great and daring project of changing the religions universally received.

2d.—That these men, intending to substitute to judaism and paganism, another plan of religion; have *conceived* a system the most *sublime*,—a mode of worship the *purest*,—a religion the most detached *from sense*, and from any indulgence of the passions—and which best unites, *all the great principles of theology, with those of morals and of civil government.*

3d.—That these same men, who gave such excellent lessons on piety, justice, temperance, rectitude, and charity; and who to these lessons, have in fact added a striking example of virtuous conduct; were however nothing but *cheats*; who have upheld all their doctrine by falsehood and blasphemy; making no scruple to offend God, to deceive man, and to precipitate their followers into a gulph of miseries.

4th.—That these same men, who talk and write so sensibly, have been frantic enough to sacrifice themselves in cold blood, and with singular perseverance; to the strange madness of maintaining a story, of which *they knew the falsehood*, and from which they derived *neither honour nor advantage.*

And

And lastly, if we are to take them for *madmen and visionaries*, we must confess,—that to these madmen and visionaries, the world is indebted for a work the most difficult; and *for the noblest change that ever took place in human affairs*;—we must confess, that it is a company of wrongheaded men, who have diffused over the world, the best lights it ever had, upon the nature of God,—upon divine worship,—upon morals,—and upon the final destination of man.

Such are the tenets, which unbelievers are forced to advance and maintain, in order to elude the proofs of the christian religion. What greater *credulity* can there be, than thus to admit paradoxes, contrary to every thing we know of man, and of his nature; and contrary to all the examples, with which we are furnished from history.

THE END.

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