

*A. G. G. G.*

A  
D E F E N C E  
OF  
REVEALED RELIGION,  
IN  
TWO SERMONS,  
PREACHED IN  
THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH  
OF  
LANDAFF;  
AND  
A CHARGE,  
DELIVERED TO  
THE CLERGY OF THAT DIOCESE,  
IN JUNE, 1795.

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SECOND EDITION.

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BY RICHARD WATSON, D. D. F. R. S.  
LORD BISHOP OF LANDAFF.

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following discourses are published, in compliance with the united request of the principal clergy and laity, before whom they were delivered. They assured me, that, at this conjuncture, a publication of them would be peculiarly useful in my diocese. If this their partiality of judgment (for such I must esteem it) should in fact be verified in any degree, I shall have no reason to regret my having yielded to a solicitation urged by such respectable authority, and in the most obliging manner. At all events, I intreat the inhabitants of my diocese to accept this publication, as a small proof of my sincere desire to promote, according to my poor ability, their spiritual welfare. I have no place of residence amongst them; but I have not, I trust, during any part of the thirteen years in which I have been connected with them, been unmindful of the duties of my station.

R. L.

Landaff, July 2d, 1795.

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Delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Lan-  
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# SERMON I.

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COL. II. 8.

BEWARE LEST ANY MAN SPOIL YOU  
THROUGH PHILOSOPHY.

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THIS apostolic benediction is peculiarly applicable to the age in which we live. It has been called—the age of philosophy—the age of reason: if by reason and philosophy, irreligion be understood, it undoubtedly merits the appellation; for there never was an age since the death of Christ, never one since the commencement of the history of the world, in which atheism and infidelity have been more generally professed. Nature and reason have been proclaimed as gods, festivals have been instituted in honour of abstract ideas, and all revealed religion has been scoffingly rejected as a

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system of statecraft and priestcraft, as a gross imposition on the understanding of mankind.

This impious fever of the mind, this paralysis of human intellect, originated in a neighbouring nation; its contagion has been industriously introduced, and is rapidly spreading in our own; it becomes us all in our several stations to endeavour to stop its progress; for of this we may all be well assured, that when religion shall have lost its hold on men's consciences, government will lose its authority over their persons, and a state of barbarous anarchy will ensue.

I know it has been made a question both in ancient and modern times—whether a society of atheists could subsist. This is no question with me, I think it could not. Many speculative opinions, in every system of religion, are of little consequence to the safety of the community, and, in all well regulated states, they are left to the free discussion of those, who think themselves interested, as advocates for truth, in defend-  
ing



ing or opposing them; but atheism seems to be irreconcilably hostile, not only to the peace, but to the very existence of civil society. If there be no God, there can be no punishment for any crime, except what is denounced against it by the laws of the land, or what is connected with it by the laws of nature; and these are restraints incapable of controlling the selfish and licentious passions of human kind. He who removes from the mind of man the hopes and fears of futurity, opens the floodgates of immorality, and lets in a deluge of vices and crimes, destructive alike of the dignity of human nature, and of the tranquillity of the world. There never yet hath existed, and there never can exist, a nation without religion. If christianity be abolished, paganism, mahometanism, some religious imposture or other must be introduced in its stead, or civil society must be given up. But in the opinion of *Bacon*, (a philosopher with whom our modern philosophers cannot be compared) “there hath not in any age been discovered any philosophy, opinion, religion, law, or discipline, which so greatly exalts the common, and lessens individual

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interest,

interest, as the christian religion doth ;” so that I know not which most to admire and deplore, their wickedness as men, or their weakness as statesmen, who have attempted to govern mankind without religion, and to establish society on the ruins of christianity.

The time, usually allotted to discourses from this place, will not allow me to refute, at length, the atheistic tenets, or to answer the deistic objections, which have been so recently propagated to the downfall of one nation, and to the danger of all; I will, however, crave your patience, whilst I state some arguments of importance, in opposition to the principles of those philosophers, who have been the authors of this mischief in a foreign country, and of their admirers in our own.

Nature and reason, they tell us, are their gods. Let them not impose upon themselves and others by the use of words, the meaning of which they do not understand. What is nature? what is reason?—these terms ought to be defined, for there is  
cause

cause to suspect, that men who introduce, or who adopt such impiety of expression, are rather ignorant of what atheism is, than that they are, what they affect to be thought, atheists on conviction. By nature then we may understand, the order and constitution of things composing the universe—and by reason, that faculty of the human mind by which we are able to discover truth.—And can it be thought, that this system of things, consisting of an infinity of parts fitted to answer ends which human wisdom can never comprehend in their full extent, but which, as far as it can comprehend them, appear to be beneficial to man and all other percipient beings—can it be thought, that this system had not an intelligent, benevolent, powerful Author?

When a man makes a watch, builds a ship, erects a silk-mill, constructs a telescope, we do not scruple to say, that the man has a design in what he does. And can we say, that this solar system, a thousand times more regular in all its motions than watches, ships, or silk-mills—that the infinity of other systems dispersed through the immensity of



space, inconceivably surpassing in magnitude and complication of motion, this, of which our earth is but a minute part—or even that the eye which now reads what is here written, a thousand times better fitted for it's function than any telescope—can we say, that there was no design in the formation of these things?

Tell us not, that it is allowed there must be intelligence in an artificer who makes a watch or a telescope, but that, as to the Artificer of the universe, we cannot comprehend his nature. What then, shall we on that account deny his existence? With better reason might a grub, buried in the bowels of the earth, deny the existence of a man, whose nature it cannot comprehend; for a grub is indefinitely nearer to man in all intellectual endowments (if the expression can be permitted), than man is to his Maker.—With better reason may we deny the existence of an intellectual faculty in the man who makes a machine; we know not the nature of the man; we see not the mind which contrives the figure, size, and adaptation of the several parts; we simply see

see the hand which forms and puts them together.

Shall a shipwrecked mathematician, on observing a geometrical figure accurately described on the sand of the sea-shore, encourage his followers with saying, "Let us hope for the best, for I see the traces of men;"—and shall not man, in contemplating the structure of the universe, or of any part of it, say to the whole human race—Brethren! be of good comfort, we are not begotten of chance, we are not born of atoms, our progenitors have not come into existence by crawling out of the mud of the Nile, behold the footsteps of a Being powerful, wise, and good—not nature, but the God of nature, the Father of the universe!

I will not entangle the understanding of my audience, or bewilder mine own, in the labyrinths of metaphysical researches; but I must say to these—the great philosophers of the age—you ought to know, that matter cannot have been from eternity—and that if, with *Plato*, you contend for the eternity of matter, you ought to know, that

motion cannot have been from eternity—and that if, with *Aristotle*, you contend for the eternity of motion, you ought to know, that with him also you must contend for the eternity of a first mover—you must introduce, what you labour to exclude, a God, causing, regulating, and preserving, by established laws, the motion of every particle of matter in the universe.

You affirm, that nature is your God, and you inform us that the energy of nature is the cause of every thing—that nature has power to produce a man.—In all this you seem to substitute the term nature for what we understand by the term God. But when you tell us that nature acts (if such exertion can be called action) necessarily and without intelligence, we readily acknowledge that your God is essentially different from our God. “All novelty is but oblivion;” this famous *system of nature*, which has excited so much unmerited attention, and done such incredible mischief throughout Europe, is in little or in nothing different from the system of certain atheistic philosophers mentioned by *Cicero*, who maintained, that  
“nature

“ nature was a certain energy, destitute of intelligence, exciting in bodies necessary motions.”—The answer is obvious and short—an energy destitute of freedom and of intelligence cannot produce a man possessing both ; as well may it be said, that an effect may be produced without a cause.

The proof of the existence of a Supreme Being, which is derived from the constitution of the visible world, is of a popular cast ; but you must not therefore suppose it to be calculated to convince only persons who cannot reason philosophically. What think you of *Newton* ? He certainly could reason philosophically. He certainly, of all the sons of men, best understood the structure of the universe ; and he esteemed that structure to be so irrefragable a proof of the existence and providence of an almighty, wise, and good Architect of nature, that he never pronounced the word—God—without a pause.—What think you of *Cotes*—second in sublimity of philosophic genius to none but *Newton* ?—“ That man,” says he, “ must be blind, who, from the most wise and excellent disposal of things, cannot immediately



diately perceive the infinite wisdom and goodness of their almighty Creator ; and he must be mad, who refuses to acknowledge them.’

The argument, which I have been hitherto insisting upon, may be called a natural argument for the Being of God, as it is taken from the contemplation of nature ; I proceed to another of great weight, which may be called ~~an~~ historical argument, as it is grounded on testimony concerning past transactions.

That this world has not been from eternity, but that it was either created from nothing, or fitted up by the Supreme Being for the habitation of man, a few thousand years ago—that it was afterwards destroyed by an universal deluge, brought upon it by the same Being—that it has been repopled by the descendants of three men, who escaped the general destruction—these things are either ancient facts, or ancient fables—if they are facts, both atheism and infidelity must be given up—and that they are facts and not fables, might, if time would permit, be

be satisfactorily proved from a detailed examination of the history of every nation in the world.

The credible annals of all nations, not excepting Egypt or Chaldea, China or India, fall short of the deluge.—The annals of all nations, ancient and modern, barbarous and civilized, speak of a deluge as of a dreadful catastrophe which had destroyed human kind, through the interposition of a superior Being offended by the vices of the world.—The annals of all nations bear witness to the existence of a God who had created all things, for even in the time of *Aristotle* there was, as he observes, “an ancient tradition (he does not say a deduction of reason, but a report or tradition) which all men had derived from their ancestors, that all things were from God, and that by God all things did consist.”—(ΕΙ ΤΕ ΘΕΟΙ ΤΑ ΠΑΝΤΑ, ΚΑΙ ΔΙΑ ΘΕΟΝ ΗΜΙΝ ΣΥΝΕΣΤΗΚΕΝ. *Arist. de Mund. Cr.*)—Remarkable words these! and analogous to those of *St. Paul*, speaking of Christ, and, as is generally thought, of the creation of the material world, “All things were created by him, and for him; and he is before all things,

things, and by him all things consist."

(*τα πάντα δι αὐτῆς καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἐκτίσται, καὶ αὐτὸς ἐστὶ πρὸ πάντων, καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκε.* Col. i. 17.)

He who has employed most time in examining the history of remote ages, will be most convinced of the truth of the following propositions—that profane authors derived their notions of a Supreme Being from patriarchal tradition—that they corrupted this tradition—that the bible is the only book in the world in which this tradition is preserved in it's original purity—that this invaluable book throws light upon the origin and ancient history of every nation in the world—and that the history of the Jews, contained in the bible, and connected with their history to the present time, is the strongest proof which can be brought, not only against atheism, but against that species of deism which contends, that God never visibly interposed in the government of the Jewish nation.

When it is said that the annals of all nations fall short of the deluge, it must be understood, that the nation of the Jews is  
excepted.

excepted. I look upon that people with astonishment and reverence; they are living proofs of facts most ancient and most interesting to mankind. Where do we meet with an Assyrian, Persian, Grecian, Roman, corroborating, by his testimony, any one of the events mentioned in the history of their respective empires? But we meet with millions of Jews in every quarter, and in every country of the world, who acknowledge not only the existence of a God, as other nations do—but that he is the very God who enabled Moses to work miracles in Egypt; who delivered to him that law which they now observe; who called Abraham, the father of their nation, from the midst of his idolatrous kinsmen; who preserved Noah and his family in the ark; who formed Adam out of the dust of the earth; who created all things by the word of his power.

Wherever we have a Jew on the surface of the earth, there we have a man, whose testimony and whose conduct connect the present time with the beginning of all time. He now believes, and he declares that all his progenitors have constantly believed, the  
history



history contained in the book of Moses to be a true history—he now obeys the laws which God gave to Moses above three thousand years ago—now practises the circumcision which God enjoined to Abraham—now observes the passover in commemoration of the mercy vouchsafed to his nation when God destroyed the first-born throughout the land of Egypt—now keeps holy the seventh day, on which God rested from the works of the creation. When nations institute rites to preserve the memory of great events, the uniform observance of the rite authorizes us to admit the certainty of the fact. The Jews have for thousands of years (and the patriarchs, before the Jews, probably did the same) observed a very significant rite in commemoration of the creation; and another in commemoration of their preservation from one of the plagues of Egypt: why should we hesitate to admit the certainty of these events? Adam lived with Methuselah 240 years, Methuselah lived with Shem the son of Noah 98 years, and Shem lived with Abraham 150 years: what apprehension can we reasonably entertain that the account of the creation could either have been forged or misre-

misrepresented, when it had passed through so few hands before it reached the founder of the Jewish nation?

But I have already gone beyond the limit I had prescribed to myself in this argument, I cannot pursue it farther; sceptical men, however, will do well to consider the nature and weight of historic evidence, not only for the existence of God, but for his having made a revelation of himself to the Jewish nation. Let them examine the matter freely and fully, and I cannot but believe that they will come to the following conclusions—that the creation is a fact—that the deluge is a fact—that the re-peopling the world by the descendants of Noah is a fact—that the Jewish theocracy is a fact—and that these facts may be established, as all past transactions of great antiquity must be, by the authority of history, and especially by the history of the Jews, whom God appears to have constituted witnesses of his existence and providence to all nations in all ages. Of the Chaldeans, Egyptians, Tyrians, and of other nations, God hath made, or will make, a *full end*; but the seed of  
*Israel*

*Israel shall not cease from being a nation before him for ever.*

If the refutation of atheism and deism be so easy and certain as I have here stated it to be, whence comes it that there are now so many, or that there ever were any either atheists, or unbelievers in the truth of the Jewish and Christian dispensations? I put these dispensations together, because those amongst us (I speak not of the Jews), who deny or admit the divine mission of Moses, will deny also or admit the divine mission of Jesus Christ.

There are many causes of infidelity, such as—profligacy of manners, which induces men to hope that religion may not be true—want of serious attention to the proofs on which it is established—hasty conclusions that, because some religions have been proved to be impostures, all are so—superstitious ceremonies and revolting doctrines, which are, in many parts of christendom, pertinaciously maintained as parts of christianity—intolerance, secularity, hypocrisy, conspicuous in the lives of christians—these and other causes  
of



of infidelity might be enlarged upon at great length, but I will only beg your attention to one other, less obvious, and less general, but more dangerous than any of those which I have mentioned—more dangerous, inasmuch as it operates chiefly on the minds of men of the most cultivated and enlarged understandings, I mean—mistaken piety.

That the Creator and Governor of the universe, who endureth through eternity, and filleth immensity ; that this Almighty Being, who hath distributed innumerable systems of material worlds through the profundity of space, and hath, probably, replenished them all with percipient beings, capable of enjoying the happiness which his goodness hath wisely allotted to their respective stations ; that this self-existent, uncaused cause of all Being, whom no language can describe, no thought can comprehend, should at sundry times and in divers instances have suspended the laws of nature which he had established, visited in an extraordinary manner this little globe, this atom of the universe, and by signs and wonders have made a re-

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velation



velation of his will to such a worm as man—this appears to many men, of good lives and strong minds, so strange a fact, that they are persuaded no human testimony can establish it's credibility. They venerate the majesty of the Supreme Being, they are persuaded that all things were made by him, and that all things are sustained by him; but they think that it derogates from the infinity of his wisdom and of his power, to suppose things to have been at first so ill made, as to require his subsequent interposition to regulate or amend them.

Blessed God! what is this but making our ways thy ways, but measuring thy infinity by the standard of our philosophy? We know the difficulty of regulating the minute concerns of a kingdom, a province, or a family, by special interpositions of any one man's wisdom or authority; and thence we simply infer, that the interposition of the Almighty in governing every part of the universe is a circumstance not to be expected. We know that a machine of our construction approaches to perfection in  
proportion

proportion as it wants not external aid to direct or preserve it's motion, and thence we simply infer that the works of God, which cannot but be perfect in their kind, want not his interposition. Absolute perfection belongs to God alone ; in all the things which he hath made there is a gradation of excellence, each thing is as perfect as it's nature will admit :—now why may it not be the nature of man to admit indefinite improvement from divine institution ? It will be granted that man would be a more perfect Being than he is, if, on all occasions, his passions were kept in subjection to his reason, if he was guilty of no impiety towards his Maker, of no uncharitableness towards his neighbour, of no violence towards himself in an intemperate indulgence of his appetites :—where then is the absurdity of supposing, that God may have thought fit to strengthen the reason and to weaken the passions of mankind by bringing *immortality to light*, by giving an actual example of a resurrection from the dead, by promulgating the certainty of rewards and punishments in another state ?

Surely it is a mistaken piety, which, from a sublime idea of the Divine Essence, would exclude the Supreme Being from interfering in the works which he hath made, which would hinder him from still working, till he hath brought all things to that perfection for which his goodness intended them. What that perfection is we know not ; it must ever fall infinitely short of the perfection of God himself, but it is not possible for us to say to what degree it may be advanced, or to point out the best means fitted to advance it to the degree predetermined in the councils of the Almighty. We cannot look into the depths of God's wisdom, nor comprehend the ends he has in view, or the ways by which he effects them.

It is the not properly considering the extent of our capacity, the not clearly distinguishing the things to which our ideas are suited, from those to which they are inadequate, that has made many men fall into an irksome scepticism, some into actual infidelity, and a few into the madness of atheism.

For

For what purpose was I born?—in what course of actions does the felicity of my nature consist?—am I author of these reputed actions, or am I a machine incessantly and irresistibly impelled to action, by external motives over which I have no controul?—will my existence be terminated by death, or continued beyond it?—will the quality of my future existence (if there should happen to be one) depend on my moral conduct here? These and other questions of similar import every man of reflection must, at one time or other, put to himself; and when he does put them, he will perceive that his reason is unequal to the clear solution of any of them. That Jesus Christ was born in Judea near 1800 years ago—that he wrought miracles in that country—that he was crucified at Jerusalem—that he arose from the dead—that he ascended into heaven—that he enabled his disciples to work miracles, and commanded them to teach the world the doctrines which he had taught them—these are some of the main facts on which the truth of the christian religion is founded. Now it appears to me to be a much easier matter to prove the truth of these facts, than to give,



from reason, a satisfactory answer to any of the difficulties which I have mentioned.

In the ardour of youth, in the tumult of sensual passion, in the profligacy of dissipation, in the bustle of business, in the sordidness of avarice, in the loftiness of ambition, thoughts of such a serious cast may either not occur, or not be regarded. But they will obtrude themselves on a bed of sickness at any period of life; they will surround the pillow of the unfortunate; they will penetrate the recesses of retirement, whether occasioned by a satiety of enjoyment, the chagrin of disappointment, or by any of the sad vicissitudes incident to every human station; and if they should arrest our notice on no other occasion, they will certainly steal upon us with the increase of our age, and generate, in those who reject christianity, no small perturbation, when the feebleness of declining life most requires tranquillity and consolation.

Be it our business then, as it is our duty and our interest, to confirm ourselves in the belief of that gospel by which all difficulties

culties of this nature are done away. If that gospel be true, (as it certainly is,) we know for what purpose we are born—that we may live for ever. We know that we are not machines, but accountable for our actions, which machines cannot be. We know in what the felicity of our nature doth consist—in living *soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*. We know that death is not *eternal sleep*, but the commencement of everlasting life.

I conclude with recommending one observation to the serious attention of all unbelievers, who are sincerely desirous of becoming christians—that they would well consider the quality of the proof which the subject admits. The truth of the christian religion is, as to us, founded on the reality of past transactions. Now past transactions are neither the objects of sense, nor of intuition, nor of demonstration; we cannot, correctly speaking, be said to know that they ever existed; but the probability, which is grounded on testimony, approaches, in many cases, so near to certainty, that our belief of past transactions is little different

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from

from knowledge itself. He who requires more than probability before he will embrace christianity, requires what the nature of the subject does not admit, and subverts the foundation of all history, sacred and profane. That Jesus wrought miracles in Judea, and arose from the dead at Jerusalem, are facts as capable of being ascertained, and as worthy of being credited, as that Cæsar lived at Rome, and was murdered in the capitol.

May the merciful Father of the whole human race, who, for reasons best known to his unsearchable wisdom, hath suffered many millions to die, and suffers many millions also now to live, in utter ignorance of that revelation of his will, which he hath given to the christian world, accept our humble thanksgivings for such an inestimable benefit! May he *establish, strengthen, settle* the inhabitants of these kingdoms in the faith of Christ; and be graciously pleased to remove from all others the *ignorance that is in them, lest, in being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and*  
*without*

*without God in the world, they become to every good work reprobate; left, in being spoiled through philosophy and vain deceit, they fall into perdition, temporal and eternal.*



## S E R M O N II.

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2 PET. I. 16.

WE HAVE NOT FOLLOWED CUNNINGLY DEVISED  
FABLES, WHEN WE MADE KNOWN UNTO YOU THE  
POWER AND COMING OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST,  
BUT WERE EYE-WITNESSES OF HIS MAJESTY.

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WHETHER the christian religion be  
a revelation of the will of God, or a  
cunningly devised fable, is a question which,  
one might think, every serious man would  
examine with impartial attention. He would  
take, it might be expected, the New Testa-  
ment into his hand; and observing that it  
consisted of various parts, and had been  
written by different authors, he would in-  
quire what evidence there was for it's being  
a *genuine* book. If he found, as I am per-  
suaded he would find, that there were as  
solid reasons for believing that the gospel of  
St. Luke, and the Acts of the Apostles,  
were

were written by him, and the other parts of the New Testament by the persons to whom they are ascribed, as that the history of the Peloponnesian war was written by Thucydides, or the lives of the Cæsars by Suetonius; he would then inquire, whether the book was not only a genuine, but an *authentic* one; that is, whether it contained a narration of events which had really taken place in Judea, near eighteen hundred years ago, or whether there was any reasonable cause to suspect that the authors of the New Testament had not honestly related what had really happened. With respect to the honesty of the writers, he would judge of that from their characters; and with respect to the reality of the facts mentioned by them, he would consider, that most of the writers of the New Testament did not relate what they had heard, but what they had seen; so that, if they were honest men, there could remain no doubt of the truth of what they had delivered. He would be ready to admit, that, as simple historians, they might, notwithstanding their honesty, have fallen into trivial mistakes in their narration of what they had seen; and that, notwithstanding their honesty,

they

they might have been full of credulity, and liable to imposition; but he would think it quite impossible, that facts of such public notoriety and importance as the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, could have been the subjects either of human error, or credulity, in those who professed to have been eye-witnesses of what they related. He would therefore certainly conclude, that the christian religion was true, if the writers of the New Testament were honest men.

If the writers of the New Testament were not honest men, they were impostors: now that they were not impostors, may appear from considering—that they had neither motive to commence, nor ability to carry on an imposture—and from examining the account they give of themselves and of their associates, immediately before, and soon after the resurrection of Jesus.

Impostors are moved to the attempt of deceiving mankind by prospects of wealth, fame, power, pleasure; by some real or imaginary advantage to be derived to themselves, or, through them, to those whom they  
love

love and regard as themselves. Now no expectation of this kind can, with the least shadow of probability, be ascribed to all, or to any of the writers of the New Testament. There is no need of entering into the proof of this; every one knows that Jews and Romans, Greeks and Barbarians; that the powers of the world, wherever they went, were against the apostles; they durst not any where lift up so much as an arm in their own defence. Instead of temporal advantages of any kind, they had to expect, and they did in fact experience, hunger, and cold, and nakedness, and scorn, and contempt, and hatred, all the miseries incident to a state of poverty, all the calamities attendant on a state of religious persecution:—these are not the motives which induce men to become impostors.—Read the history of the impostor *Mahomet*, or that of *Alexander* as described by Lucian, or that of *Apollonius of Tyana*; and contrast them with that of Christ, or any of his apostles; and you will at once perceive the difference between the manner in which imposture and truth are introduced and established in the world. Compare the miracles recorded in the New Testament,

with



with respect to their publicity, their beneficial tendency, and their influence on the thousands who saw them, with the tricks of ancient or modern pretenders to magic ; and you will at once perceive the difference between cunningly devised delusions operating on fanatical minds, and the simplicity of gospel wonders extorting conviction from the most incredulous. The apostles were as destitute of ability to deceive, as of inducement to impose a fable on the world. It requires great power, or great talents, to be a successful impostor ; and the difficulty is increased, when the plot cannot be carried on without the concurrence of many assistants ; and especially when it is to be carried on, in opposition to men able and willing to detect the cheat. What should we think of twelve fishermen, who should now undertake to proclaim, in the hearing of the learned and unlearned, that a few years ago a certain man wrought many miracles, not only in a distant country, but in the streets and churches of the metropolis of the kingdom ; not only before them, the relaters of the fact, but in the presence of thousands of others ; and that this man was publicly tried by order of government, and  
put

put to death in London; and that he rose from the dead; and that after his resurrection he was seen not only by themselves, but by hundreds of others, and by some who were still alive?—What should we think of such assertions, of such audacious appeals to living witnesses, when in truth this man had not risen from the dead, nor wrought any miracle whatever?—What should we think of twelve fishermen, who, without understanding any language but their own, should go to Paris, Rome, Madrid, Constantinople, and endeavour to propagate the same thing? Is it credible that any men could be found so mad as to make the attempt, or that, if they did make it, they should have the good fortune to succeed in their imposition?

That a great part of the world is converted to christianity, is a fact;—that the foundation of this conversion was laid by the apostles, is another fact;—that the apostles were men of mean connections, slender talents, slow apprehensions; of powers, faculties, and dispositions, utterly inadequate to the introducing and supporting an imposture, are other facts, of which, when properly considered,

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we cannot, it is apprehended, suffer ourselves to doubt. If we admit the account, contained in the New Testament, concerning the means by which the christian religion was established, every thing is credible ; if we reject it, every thing is incredible ; no satisfactory reason can be assigned for the zeal, or for the success of the apostles in propagating an untruth ; their zeal will want a motive, and their success will want a cause adequate to the effect.

Consider farther, that there is no book now in the world, nor, as far as we know, ever was one, contradicting any of the facts recorded in the New Testament ; but that there are several books, *written by men who were not christians*, which confirm many of them : *Tacitus*, in particular, confirms a fact of principal importance ; for he tells us, that Jesus Christ was put to death by Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea.—There is not therefore any external testimony, that the writers of the New Testament have written a fable ; if we refuse to believe their narration, our refusal, if it has any foundation beside that of prejudice and ignorance  
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of the subject, must be built on something contained in the New Testament itself; now every thing related in the New Testament, and especially what is related concerning the conduct of the apostles, before and after the resurrection of Jesus, carries with it the strongest proof of the honesty of the writers of it; and if they were honest men, the christian religion is true.

What would have been the conduct of dishonest men, who had combined to cheat the world into a belief of what had never happened, into the adoption of a new religion of which they themselves were to be the principal promoters? Would they have ever told to the world circumstances so disgraceful to their characters, as the evangelists have done? Impostors carefully conceal their ambition, their avarice, their cowardice, their insincerity, their vices and imperfections of every kind, and make an ostentatious display of virtues and excellencies which they do not really possess. But the evangelists, having no design to deceive, relate, without disguise, facts tending to lower their characters in the general estimation of

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mankind. They tell us that there was a strife among the apostles, which of them should be the greatest; and that, as interested and ambitious men are wont to do, they had all been very forward in professing to Jesus their strong attachment to him—"that if they should die with him, they would not deny him:"—they then proceed to inform us, disgraceful as the account is, that in a very few hours after they had made these solemn professions, when the moment of peril came, and their selfish views were blasted,—“they all forsook him and fled.”—This humiliating narrative is a proof of their veracity as historians, and their conduct on the occasion is highly credible.

Notwithstanding the long intimacy which the apostles of Jesus had enjoyed with him; notwithstanding the distinction with which they had been honoured by him; notwithstanding the knowledge they had of the probity of his manners, of the purity of his doctrines, and of the greatness of his power in working miracles; notwithstanding the promise he had made them of his going to prepare a place for them in his Father's kingdom,

dom, of his rising from the dead, of his returning to them again, and of his not leaving them comfortless ; notwithstanding these and many other circumstances sufficient, one might at first view have imagined, to have generated courage, and secured attachment in all his followers, yet they all abandoned him in his distress—"forsook him and fled—the shepherd was smitten, and the sheep were scattered."

This conduct was extremely natural. The disciples of Jesus, and his apostles especially, expected that their master would become a great temporal prince, and that they were to participate in the power, wealth, and honour, which he would at length attain. But when they saw him seized by his enemies, and dragged as a malefactor before the great council of the nation, they not only gave up their hopes of advancement, but were alarmed for their own personal safety ; they yielded to fears inseparable from humanity ; and which are seldom overcome, except by persons impressed with high notions of honourable reputation. This conduct of the apostles is so intirely conformable to what we every

day observe, that it forces, as it were, our assent to the truth of the narration. When the founder of a sect in religion, or the leader of a faction in the state, happens to fall into disgrace, his adherents presently begin to be shy of his acquaintance; and if he happens not merely to fall into disgrace, but to be arrested as a pestilent disturber of the public peace, then do they begin to avoid him; and if they cannot escape the suspicion of being known to him, they begin, especially if they be men of low education, to lie and to swear, as Peter did, that they know not the man, never had communication or connection with him.

Compare this selfishness and cowardice of the apostles, with the courage and disinterestedness which soon after adorned their character, and try if you can discover any sufficient reason for so remarkable a change of conduct and principle.

Did Pilate, repenting of his wickedness, extend the protection of the civil power to the followers of Jesus, whom, contrary to all the rules of civil justice, he had condemned

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demned to death, though he confessed that he found no cause of death in him? No, we hear nothing of the repentance of Pilate.—Did the chief priests and elders of the Jewish people, repenting of the premeditated malice by which they had sought the life of Jesus, by which they had bribed Judas to betray innocent blood, by which they had intimidated Pilate to crucify a just person; did these men, struck with remorse, encourage the apostles to adhere to their crucified master? No, these men retained their malice after the object of it was removed, they persecuted the apostles for preaching in the name of Jesus.—Did the multitude, who a few days before his trial had ushered Jesus into Jerusalem with triumphant acclamations of applause; who, at the time of his trial, as if drunk with fury, had cried out, “crucify him, crucify him, his blood be on us and our children;” did this multitude (as is not unusual with multitudes to do) once more change their mind, and undertake the defence of the followers of that man, whom in their phrenzy they had murdered? No, we read nothing of the multitude becoming supporters of the apostles,



till the wonders and signs which were done by them, brought fear on every soul; the support of the multitude was subsequent to the preaching of Peter and the apostles, it could not therefore have been the cause of their courage.—Joseph of Arimathea was a disciple of Christ, and a rich man; Nicodemus was a disciple of Christ, and a powerful man, for he was a ruler of the Jews; did these or any other men by their wealth or authority inspire the apostles with fortitude to face their enemies, and the enemies of their crucified Lord? No, nothing of this kind, but the contrary of it appears in the history; for it appears that the disciples on the day of the resurrection, and for some days afterwards, were so full of apprehension, that they assembled privately with the door of their apartment shut, for fear of the Jews. What was it then that caused the apostles to change their cowardice into courage, their desertion into attachment, their aim at worldly advancement into a voluntary surrender of every worldly comfort, into a patient submission to every evil which could afflict human nature? What, but the conviction that their Lord was risen from the dead?

dead? This is a cause adequate to the effect; it is a misuse of time, and a perversion of talents, to seek for any other. This conduct of the apostles before, and after the resurrection of their Lord, is a strong argument in support of the truth of our holy religion.

Let us consider more particularly the account which is given of their conduct. After the crucifixion of Jesus, the apostles were obliged to stay at Jerusalem at least a week, that they might keep the passover according to the law; during this period Jesus appeared twice to them when they were assembled together. After the feast was ended, they returned to their native country, Galilee; and Jesus appeared to them, at the place he had before appointed: it is probable that he shewed himself frequently to them in that country, for he was seen of them forty days, speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. On the approach of the feast of Pentecost, or the feast of weeks, which, according to the law, was to be kept at Jerusalem by all the Jews, fifty days after the celebration of the

passover, the apostles went from Galilee to Jerusalem; and there they were again met by their master; who commanded them to stay at Jerusalem, till they were endued with power from on high, till they were baptized by the Holy Ghost, which he assured them they would be in a little time. He gave them also their commission—"Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.—And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight."—A few days after this, they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and enabled to speak a variety of languages which they had never learned, and to work miracles surpassing all human power.

Now supposing the scripture account of the resurrection of Jesus; of his frequently appearing to his disciples after his resurrection; of his instructing them in the nature of his kingdom; of his giving them a commission to bear witness concerning him to all  
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the world ; of his ascending into heaven while they looked on him ; of his sending the Holy Ghost, by which they were enabled to speak with tongues, and to work miracles ; supposing these things to have really happened, what conduct would you have expected from the apostles ? Precisely that which they adopted. They no longer denied their master, no longer shut themselves up in secret, no longer feared the Jewish rulers, no longer disputed amongst themselves which of them should have the first place in the kingdom of Christ ; but relinquishing all earthly comfort, setting at defiance all opposition, braving all persecution, they went through the world executing the commission they had received, every where maintaining—that Jesus of Nazareth, whilst he was alive, was a man proved to be from God, by miracles which God did by him ; that God raised him from the dead ; that after his resurrection they frequently conversed with him ; that they saw him ascend into heaven ; and that they received from him the power of speaking with tongues, and of working miracles.

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Had Jesus Christ never risen from the dead, christianity would, probably, never have been extended beyond the limits of Judea. His disciples might have acquired a peculiar denomination, and would certainly have esteemed him a great prophet; but not *the* prophet, not the Messiah, whom they expected to come into the world. In the interval between his death and his resurrection, the minds of his apostles were perplexed with doubts concerning his being the person who was to restore Israel. They were so backward in crediting the reports which were brought to them of his resurrection, that, it is evident, they either did not believe, or, in the tumult of their grief, did not advert to what he had told them of his rising again the third day; and it is very probable that, if he had not risen from the dead, his disciples would have contented themselves with reverencing, in secret, the memory of their master; they could not have doubted concerning the reality of the miracles which they had seen him perform; but they would neither have had the courage to attempt the conversion of the world to a dead man, nor the means to effect it.

History affords many instances of men who have sustained with fortitude the greatest persecutions in support of opinions perfectly erroneous, as well as in support of those which are founded in truth. A Jew will sooner be tortured by the inquisition, and burned at the stake, than he will acknowledge Jesus to be the Messiah. A christian will suffer martyrdom, sooner than he will deny that Jesus is the Messiah. A Mahometan will sooner be put to death, than he will own Mahomet to have been an impostor; and both Jews and Christians will suffer any persecution sooner than they will acknowledge him to have been a prophet sent from God. It is not only in these great points that human fortitude triumphs over pain and death; but there is no christian sect which cannot boast of numbers who would seal, I do not say, the truth, but their opinion of the truth, with their blood. Servetus was burned to death, because he would not profess, that he believed Christ to be the eternal Son of God, though, in the midst of the flames, he professed that Christ was the Son of the eternal God;—and Calvin would have suffered the death which he made Servetus suffer, sooner than he would have

have acknowledged, that Christ was not the eternal Son of the eternal God.—We learn from the history of fanaticism and superstition, that men have died martyrs to opinions unintelligible, absurd, immoral, impious. All this may be allowed, but the inference, which is generally drawn by sceptical men from such observations, cannot be allowed; the inference is this—that the fortitude of the apostles, in sustaining persecution, is no proof of the truth of the christian religion, inasmuch as an equal degree of fortitude has often been displayed by other men in support of opinions evidently not true.—This inference cannot be allowed for this reason—that an essential difference is to be made between him who dies in attestation of a matter of fact, and him who dies in attestation of an opinion. The apostles died in attestation of their having seen Jesus work miracles, whilst he was alive; and of their having conversed with him after his resurrection from the dead. These are not abstruse opinions, but things which either did, or did not happen; any man is competent to say whether he saw them happen or not; and the apostles died in maintaining that they did see them happen: they “were eye-witnesses of  
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of his majesty." The christian martyrs who had never seen Jesus, nor been eye-witnesses of any miracles wrought by him, or by others in his name, but who died, rather than they would abandon the belief which they had adopted, contributed, by their constancy, to the propagation of the christian religion ; but they did not establish it's truth in the same way that the apostles did.

The christians of the present age are strong in opinion, that Jesus was raised from the dead—the Jews and unbelievers of the present age are strong in opinion, that Jesus was not raised from the dead. Christians and Jews, of all preceding ages, till we come to the very time when this great event—the resurrection of Jesus—either did or did not happen, have been uniform in their respective opinions, and both are now ready to shed their blood in support of them ; there is no hypocrisy in the profession of either ; what reason then has an impartial inquirer after truth to credit the christian rather than the Jew ?—He has this reason ; the groundwork of the belief of the christian is a matter of fact attested by eye-witnesses ; but the  
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groundwork of the belief of the Jew is an assertion destitute of proof. The Jews, who lived at the time when Jesus either did or did not rise from the dead, found the sepulchre, in which his body had been laid, empty. The sepulchre might have become empty two ways, either by the body having been raised from the dead, or by it's having been taken away. The Jews asserted that it was taken away by his disciples, but they gave no proof of their assertion; they neither pretended to have seen it taken away, nor to have seen it after it had been taken away. The apostles also found the sepulchre empty, but they did not, from that circumstance, assert, that Jesus was risen from the dead; no, they asserted that they had seen him, handled him, eaten with him, conversed with him, not only once, but often, and in different places, after his resurrection from the dead. Now, no one, who understands the nature of evidence, can hesitate in pronouncing, that the belief of the christians of the present age, when traced back to it's origin, is founded on a rock, on the testimony of eye-witnesses to a matter of fact; whilst that of the Jews is founded

founded on an assertion of their ancestors not only destitute of proof, but utterly incredible, as might easily be shewn from an examination of the circumstances attending the crucifixion and interment of Jesus:

Had the chief priests reported, that, in consequence of the precautions they had taken, the body of Jesus was on the third day after the crucifixion found in the sepulchre; and had the apostles reported, that on the third day the body was not found in the sepulchre, and said no more upon the subject; the christians and Jews of succeeding ages might, with some appearance of reason, have disputed concerning the degree of credit due to the testimony of their respective progenitors. Yet, even on this supposition, the christian would have had a better foundation for his belief, than the Jew could lay claim to: for the predecessors of the christian sacrificed their lives in support of their testimony, but the predecessors of the Jew gave no such proof of their sincerity and truth.

The sum of what has been said amounts  
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to this—we have as great, if not greater reason to believe, that the history of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as related in the New Testament, is a genuine and authentic history, as we have to believe in the genuineness and authenticity of any other ancient book—we have no evidence external or internal to induce us to conclude, that the apostles had either ability or motive to introduce and propagate an imposture. The selfishness, ambition, and cowardice of the apostles, shewn during the life, and at the death of Jesus, are perfectly natural and credible; and when contrasted with their subsequent disinterestedness, humility, and fortitude, afford an exceeding strong proof, both of the general veracity of the evangelists as historians, and of the fact of the resurrection of Jesus, as a cause adequate to the production of so great, and otherwise unaccountable change in their character and conduct.

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REVEREND BRETHREN,

THE pleasure which I experience in meeting you on such occasions as the present, is always accompanied with some degree of anxiety. I am fearful, lest I should have nothing to produce to you worthy your attention, as scholars, and divines; and I think too well of your general good conduct, in the discharge of your parochial duties, to employ the time in reprehending you for faults, which, probably, do not exist; or in cautioning you against errors, to which you probably are not prone.

On a former occasion I took the liberty of giving you my advice, on the necessity of your thoroughly examining the foundation on which your faith, as christians, is built ;  
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and I, at this time, repeat the advice with great earnestness and sincerity. An attack has been openly made in a foreign country, and is secretly carrying on in our own; not on modes of worship, or church discipline, not on disputable articles of faith; not on any of the out-works of christianity; but on the citadel itself. We know indeed, that this citadel is founded on a rock, which no human force can subvert; yet we are placed in it as sentinels, to detect the artifice of those who covertly undermine, and to repel the aggression of those who openly assail it; and we know the punishment which awaits soldiers sleeping on their post.

There have been men in former ages, and there are not a few in our own, who think and speak of the clergy, as destitute either of understanding, or honesty; who represent them as interested in the support of a superstition; and ready, at all times, to sacrifice their probity as men, on the altar of professional hypocrisy; who stigmatize them as the protectors of ignorance, and the persecutors of science. A philosopher, says *Helvetius*, has for his enemies, the Bonzees, the Dervises,

vices, the Bramins, the ministers of every religion in the world. Let us forgive these philosophers, whether foreign or domestic, this wrong; but let us, at the same time, beg them to consider—that we, as well as they, are subjects of a free state, in which the road to wealth and distinction is open to every man of ability; and more open, perhaps, to men of ability in other professions, than in that of the church—that we, as well as they, enjoy talents from the gift of God, and have been as sedulous as themselves, (speaking without arrogance) in the improvement of them. Are they mathematicians, natural philosophers, metaphysicians, logicians, classical scholars? so are we.—I speak not of individuals, much less of myself, but of the great body of the British clergy. There is not a single branch of knowledge, in which the clergy are not equal, at least, to those who injuriously impute to them the grossness of ignorance in believing an imposture, or the more degrading and flagitious infamy of supporting what they do not believe.

It is true, that lawyers, physicians, soldiers, men in every profession, are wont to acquire a partiality for that in which they have been educated; and by the almost irresistible force of habit, think more highly of its excellencies, and are disposed to defend its defects with more pertinacity than reason will allow. If a prepossession of this kind should be observable in the professors of christianity, or in the advocates for any particular system of christianity, a candid mind would be ready rather to apologize for the infirmity, than to condemn it, as springing from a corrupted source of interest or ambition. What interest can an Unitarian or an Arian have in dissenting from the faith esteemed orthodox? If either, or both of them are in an error, may the mercy of God forgive them! but let not the unmerciful judgment of man condemn them.—What interest can a deist of upright morals (and there are many such,) have in contending, that the Supreme Being gave no law to Moses, no revelation of his will to mankind by Jesus Christ; but that Moses and the prophets, that Jesus and the apostles were like

like Confucius, Zoroaster, Numa, Mahomet, and their several associates; that they pretended to a divine authority, which was not vouchsafed to them? We believe, that the divine missions of Moses and of Jesus may be established, and that they have been repeatedly established, by arguments, which are utterly inapplicable to every other religion which hath taken place among mankind; but we do not take upon us to anathematize, with fiery zeal, every one who does not believe as we do; we pray for his conversion to what we esteem the truth, and we request him to admit, that the sincerity of our belief in christianity is as great as that of his unbelief; if he thinks otherwise of us, he thinks amiss; if he speaks otherwise, he becomes a calumniator.

This moderation, which, on all occasions, I recommend as proper for us to observe towards those who differ from us, either partially, or wholly, and which, in return, we have a right to expect from them, is not to be interpreted into an indifference either towards christianity in general, or towards that particular mode of it which is establish-



ed in these kingdoms. The church of England may be maintained, and it is our duty to maintain it, with zeal regulated by charity, against all its enemies, till they have convinced us, that a less defective system of doctrine, worship, and discipline, might be peaceably introduced in its stead; and this, if we may judge from what we have read of former times, or observed of our own, the opposers of the establishment will not be able speedily to accomplish.

He who wishes to repair an ancient fortress, when he sees it attacked by a thousand enemies, disfigured by the rubbish of a thousand ages, cannot, without great injustice, be ranked with those who labour to overturn it.

Nor is the defence of the christian religion abandoned, when we allow unbelievers the full liberty of producing all the arguments they can in support of their infidelity. Our liberality in this respect proceeds not from any supineness, or inattention towards what we esteem of inestimable value, but from a total dislike of dogmatism, and intolerance;  
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—principles ill comporting with the weakness of human understanding, and with the benignity of the christian religion; and from a strong persuasion that the result of the most critical scrutiny into the foundations of our faith will be a confirmation of it's truth. The time I think is approaching, or is already come, when christianity will undergo a more severe investigation than it has ever yet done. My expectation, as to the issue, is this—that catholic countries will become protestant, and that protestant countries will admit a farther reformation.—In expressing this expectation, which I am far from having the vanity to propose with oracular confidence, I may possibly incur the censure of some, who think that protestantism, as established in Germany, in Switzerland, in Scotland, in England, is, in all these, and in other countries, so perfect a system of christianity, that it is incapable of any amendment in any of them. If this should be the case, I must console myself with reflecting, that the greatest men could not, in their day, escape unmerited calumny. Every age has had it's Sacheverell's, it's Hickeys's, and it's Chenells's; who, with the bitterness of theo-

logical odium, sharpened by party rancour, have not scrupled to break the bonds of christian charity. Hoadly was called a dissenter, Chillingworth a Socinian, and Tillotson both Socinian and atheist; and all of them experienced this obloquy, from contemporary zealots, on account of the liberality of their sentiments, on account of their endeavouring to render christianity more rational than it was in certain points generally esteemed to be. I had certainly rather submit to imputations, which even these great men could not avoid, than be celebrated as the mightiest champion of the church on the system of intolerance, or the most orthodox contender for the faith on the system of those who maintain, that our first reformers have left us no room for improvement in scriptural learning. With whatever assurance other men may be persuaded, that they have attained certain knowledge of the truth of all christian doctrines; with whatever zeal, in consequence of that persuasion, they may foster the seeds of persecution, I confess that there are many points in theology on which I feel myself disposed to adopt an expression of St. Austin, when he is stating the different ways, in which he conjectures that original

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fin may have been propagated from parents to children—*quid autem horum sit verum libentius disco, quam dico, ne audeam docere quod nescio.*

*Herodotus* tells us, that *Darius* asked some of the Greeks, what sum of money he should give them to eat the bodies of their deceased parents, after the manner of the Indians. Upon their refusal to comply on any consideration, he asked some of the Indians, who were accustomed to eat the bodies of their parents, what sum they would take to burn the bodies of their parents after the Grecian manner: but they, setting up a general outcry, desired the king to have better thoughts of them. Thus it is in religion, every man is attached to the mode of worship, and the system of doctrines, to which he has been accustomed, and he looks upon other modes, and other doctrines, as bordering on impiety. This disposition is so general, that it may be considered as natural; yet, like many other natural propensities, it may be corrected; it is an evil which may be overcome by good sense. I call it an evil, because it misleads the judgment, and



and subjects men to the tyranny of prejudice. It was a prejudice of this sort which made St. Paul a persecutor of Jesus ; which made the Jews persecutors of the christians ; which made the heathens persecutors of both Jews and christians ; and which has, at times, rendered the different denominations of christians in this country, and in all other parts of christendom, persecutors of each other. There can be no question that it is the duty of all men to oppose reason to prejudice ; but, unluckily, every man thinks that he does so ; he mistakes his own conclusions for truths, which ought not to be disputed, and which cannot be illustrated ; and every argument tending to subvert them is rejected without examination. This perversion of the understanding is a great reproach to men of education and learning ; we may lament it and excuse it in the bulk of mankind, who, letting their reason lie without exercise, go, on most occasions, in matters of opinion, not in the way in which they ought to go, but in that which they have gone before. But in men habituated to the cultivation of their faculties, and to impartial investigation in other branches of knowledge,

knowledge, this prepossession in religion, the most important of all branches, is wholly reprehensible.

The great disputes, which at present agitate Europe, respect the first principle of natural religion, and the truth of all revealed religion. The first principle of natural religion is—the existence of a God, the maker, the preserver, and the moral governor of the universe. No created being can comprehend the essence of the divine nature, much less is it in the power of man to do it; but to deny the existence of a God, is such a degree of insanity, as few men in any age have fallen into; and those who have fallen into it, have been deservedly looked upon as dangerous prodigies in nature.

*Protagoras*, a philosopher of antiquity, we are told by *Cicero*, began a work with saying—“Whether there are Gods, or whether there are none, I have nothing certain to deliver on the subject.” The Athenians, fired with indignation at this daring declaration of the sophist’s scepticism, banished him

him from their city and territory, and burned his book before a public assembly of the people. In our days, a philosopher has been heard to exclaim, in a solemn convention of his countrymen, "I am an atheist." Far from resenting this public avowal of his impiety, his countrymen called out, "What is that to us? you are an honest man." I do not deny the possibility of an atheist being an honest man—*Spinoza* is said to have been one—and I am an enemy to every degree of persecution for opinion; but surely the people of Athens manifested, on a similar occasion, not only more piety, but infinitely more political wisdom, than the people of Paris—for there has yet been no instance in the world, of a state subsisting without religion.

I think it unnecessary to enter into any laboured proof of the Being and Providence of God before this audience; it is known, I presume, to every one of you, my brethren, that the existence of a Supreme Being may be established from three different sources of argumentation—from a metaphysical consideration of the  
absurdity

absurdity of an infinite series of dependent beings—from the contemplation of the order and beauty of the universe—and from the consent of all nations ; which consent has been derived by tradition from our first parents. Many writers, ancient and modern, have maintained, that the idea of God was implanted in our nature ; they were driven to this expedient, which Mr. Locke has shewn to have no foundation, from their not having been able otherwise to account for that universal consent, which prevailed not amongst the learned only, but amongst the unlearned part of mankind, concerning the Being of a God. Had they been acquainted with, or properly considered, the writings of *Moses*, they would have seen the great facility with which a knowledge of the creation, and of the existence of God, might have been disseminated throughout the world, by the descendants of *Noah*. All mankind are sprung from a common stock, and all have retained, as might have been expected, some knowledge of the cause of their common origin. There was a time when I was fond of metaphysical inquiries into the nature of the Supreme Being, and much delighted



lighted with the works of *Cudworth*, *King*, *Clarke*, *Leibnitz*, and other acute reasoners on the subject ; but I have long thought that the motions of the heavenly bodies, the propagation and growth of animals and plants, the faculties of the human mind, and even the ability of moving my hand up or down, by a simple volition, afford, when deliberately reflected on, more convincing arguments against atheism, than all the recondite lucubrations of the most profound philosophers. In a word, the argument for the existence of God, which is drawn from the contemplation of nature, is so clear and so strong, that the most ignorant can comprehend it, and the most learned cannot invent a better. This argument is so obvious to a thinking mind, that I suspect the accuracy of *Cicero's* information, when he tells us that *Anaxagoras* was the first, who taught that the universe was formed by an Intelligent Mind, distinct from matter. He himself, indeed, gives reason for this suspicion, when he observes, that *Thales*, the predecessor of *Anaxagoras*, maintained (probably from some tradition concerning the creation) that God was that  
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mind which formed all things out of water. I will conclude this head with a passage from *Chardin's* travels into *Persia*, as cited by *Fabricius*; it may be better remembered, as an argument against atheism, than a more acute disquisition would be.

The Mahometans, says this author, have invented many fabulous accounts concerning the prophets and the patriarchs of the Old Testament; amongst the rest, they tell us—that *Moses* having preached a long time to king Pharaoh, who was an atheist and a tyrant, on the existence of one eternal God, and on the creation of the world; and finding that he made no impression either upon Pharaoh or his courtiers; ordered a fine palace to be erected privately, at a considerable distance from a country residence of the king. It happened that the king, as he was a hunting, saw this palace, and inquired by whom it had been built. None of his followers could give him any information; at length *Moses* came forward, and said to him—that the palace must certainly have built itself. The king fell a laughing at his absurdity, telling him that it was a pretty thing,

thing, for a man who called himself a prophet, to say that such a palace had built itself in the middle of a desert. Moses interrupted him with saying, “ You think it a strange extravagance to affirm that this palace built itself, the thing being impossible ; and yet you believe that the world made itself. If this fine palace, which is but an atom in comparison, could not spring from itself in this desert, how much more impossible is it that this world, so solid, so great, so admirable in all it’s parts, could be made by itself, and that it should not, on the contrary, be the work of an Architect wise and powerful !” The king was convinced, and worshipped God, as Moses had instructed him to do. There is much good sense in this fable, and it’s substance is thus expressed by Cicero—*quod si mundum efficere potest concursus atomorum, cur porticum, cur templum, cur domum, cur urbem non potest ?*

When we speak concerning the truth of revealed religion, we include not only the certainty of the divine missions of Moses and of Jesus, but the nature of the several doctrines promulgated by them to mankind.

kind. Now you may ask me, what these doctrines are? I know what they are to me; but, pretending to no degree of infallibility, I think it safer to tell you where they are contained, than what they are. They are contained in the bible; and if, in the reading of that book, your sentiments concerning the doctrines of christianity should be different from those of your neighbour, or from those of the church, be persuaded on your part, that infallibility appertains as little to you, as it does to the church of which you are a member, or to any individual who differs from you. Towards the church you ought to preserve reverence and respect; and in your public teaching, you ought not, whilst you continue a minister in it, to disturb the public peace, by opposition to it's doctrines; and towards individuals, of whatever denomination of christians they may be, who differ from you, you ought to preserve charity of thought, and courtesy of conduct; and if you do this, your discordance of opinion will be attended with no mischief public or private.



Many learned men have bestowed much useless labour in defining, what are the fundamental verities of the christian religion; useless I esteem it, because the same things are not fundamental to all men, and there is no infallible judge of controversy to settle the disputes which may arise. A papist believes the doctrine of transubstantiation, of worshipping of images, of invocation of saints, of purgatory, of the infallibility (if the word may be admitted) of heretics, and of the infallibility of popes, councils, and churches, to be fundamental doctrines:—a protestant does not believe any of these doctrines to be fundamental. Protestants differ from each other in their sentiments concerning the eucharist, concerning the trinity, concerning satisfaction, original sin, and personal predestination;—but the wisest amongst them do not esteem any particular opinion concerning any of these points, to be so fundamentally right, that salvation will not belong to those who think otherwise.

Personal predestination appears to many to be a doctrine full of impiety and despair. They

They think it impious, as it represents God to be a blind or malignant Being—blind, if he dooms a man to eternal destruction without knowing whether he will do good or evil; and malignant, if knowing he makes no distinction, in his decrees, between them who obey and them who disobey him. They think it a doctrine pregnant with despair—for now to be persuaded that you are inevitably doomed to everlasting punishment, that no future rectitude of conduct, no penitence for what is past, no supplication, no intercession, nothing which can be done by yourself, or by any other for you, can in the least avail to the altering of your fate; what is this, say they, but to overwhelm the soul with the blackness of despondent horror? Is it not, they ask, a more impious doctrine than that of Epicurus? for that represented God as not troubling himself in the government of the world, as making no distinction between the righteous and the wicked, as suffering both to die and become extinct; but this represents him, as consigning to everlasting torments, those whom he had from all eternity determined to condemn. This doctrine, which St. Chry-

*fostom* amongst the ancients, and *Arminius* amongst the moderns, reprobated as unworthy of God, has been zealously maintained by *Calvin* and *St. Austin*. In my humble judgment, they have done great service to christianity, who have endeavoured to shew that it is not founded in scripture. For nothing has contributed more to the propagation of deism, than the making doctrines abhorrent from reason, parts of the christian system. There may be doctrines above reason; but nothing, which is evidently contrary to reason, can ever be justly considered as a part of the christian dispensation.—I will instance in another point.

A deist stumbles at the very threshold of religion, and turns with scorn and terror from the temple of God, when he is told that he cannot enter into it but through the gate of original sin, as described by *Fulgentius*, the disciple of *St. Austin*. He admits original sin in a certain sense, acknowledging that it is not contrary to reason, that the whole human race should, from the transgression of Adam, become subject to labour, disease, and death; but he bids us combine  
into



into one idea whatever we have read of the Manichean doctrine concerning an evil principle, of the sanguinary tenets of the worshippers of Moloch, of the cruel superstitions of paganism in every age and country; and he defies us to form any thing so hideous to imagination, so repugnant to reason, so destructive of every just notion of a Supreme Being, as the doctrine of an orthodox father of the christian church, concerning original sin. The doctrine, in the words of Fulgentius, stands thus—*firmissime tene, et nullatenus dubites, parvulos, sive in uteris matrum vivere incipiunt et ibi moriuntur, sive cum de matribus nati sine sacramento sancti baptismatis de hoc seculo transeunt, ignis æterni sempiterno supplicio puniendos.*—Parent of universal good! merciful Father of the human race! how hath the benignity of thy nature been misrepresented! how hath the gospel of thy Son been misinterpreted by the burning zeal of presumptuous man! I mean not, on this occasion, to enter into the various questions which learned men have too minutely discussed, concerning the lapse of our first parents, the original rectitude, and subsequent depravation of human



nature ; I simply mean to say, that a proposition which asserts, that infants dying in the womb will be tormented in everlasting fire, on account of Adam's transgression, is a proposition so entirely subversive of all our natural notions of the justice and mercy of the Supreme Being, that it cannot be admitted, unless a passage in scripture could be produced, in which it is clearly, and in so many words revealed ; and I am certain that no such passage can be produced.

The gospel was preached to the poor, to ignorant and unlearned men ; its leading doctrines concerning providence, a resurrection from the dead, and a future state of retribution, are so obvious, that no one who can read the scriptures can fail to see them. Can it be a matter of surprise then, that a reluctance is felt against the admission of abstruse doctrines, which require the subtlety of argute logic, and scholastic disquisition, to discover and enforce them ? When men are desirous of forming systems, they are apt to collect together a number of texts, which, being taken as abstract propositions, seem to establish the point ; but which, when interpreted

preted by the context, appear to have no relation to it. There is no greater source of error than this practice ; it has prevailed in the christian church from the earliest ages, and it still prevails. We owe to it the corruptions of popery, and that infinity of heresies, which have so much debased the simplicity of gospel-truth, and driven so many men of sense from embracing christianity: I am far from considering unbelievers as devoid of ability, or of integrity. I think they have not given the subject an unprejudiced and serious examination ; and that the principal matters to which they object are the doctrines of men, rather than the commands of God. Every one who will well weigh the subject, must perceive the unfairness with which men usually proceed, in forming systems in theology. By stringing together detached sentences, an *Ausonius* may compel the chaste *Virgil* to furnish materials for an indecent poem ; and, from the bible itself, a system of impiety might, by such means, be extracted.

But there is no doctrine of our holy religion, which has given greater offence to

unbelievers, or occasioned greater perplexity to sincere christians, than the doctrine of satisfaction. Why might not God have restored human kind to the immortality which was lost by the transgression of Adam, without requiring any atonement, satisfaction, or price of redemption? Can the benevolent Author of the universe be induced, by the death of an innocent being, to bestow a blessing on mankind, which, without such a sacrifice, he would have withheld from them? Does God Almighty, like the demons of pagan superstition, delight in blood?—These, and innumerable other questions such as these, obtrude themselves on the reluctant minds of pious and thinking men; and they are the rocks on which impious and unthinking men make shipwreck of their faith. There is one general answer which may be given to them all; and it is an answer in which intelligent and sober men will acquiesce—our incapacity to comprehend the ways of the Almighty.—What mortal knoweth for what we are reserved in another world? Who can describe the means requisite for exalting our present human nature to that degree of  
angelic

angelic excellence, without which it may not be possible for us to participate in the joys of heaven? Who hath such an insight into the past, present, and future dispensations of God—into the relation which this state bears to a future one—into the connection which the human race may *now* have, though unknown to us, or may hereafter have, though it hath not now, with other orders of beings, as positively to pronounce, that the blood of Christ was not requisite to remove from mankind the consequences of Adam's transgression? We know assuredly, that God delighteth not in blood; that he hath no cruelty, no vengeance, no malignity, no infirmity of any passion in his nature; but we do not know, whether the requisition of an atonement for transgression, may not be an *emanation of his infinite mercy*, rather than a *demand of his infinite justice*. We do not know, whether it may not be the very best means of preserving the innocence and happiness, not only of us, but of all other free and intelligent beings. We do not know, whether the suffering of an innocent person may not be productive of a degree of good, infinitely surpassing the  
evil



evil of such sufferance; nor whether such a *quantum* of good could by any other mean have been produced. The death of Christ was voluntary; he laid down his own life, that he might give life to all mankind. This, no doubt, was a great instance of his love, and is a great motive for our gratitude, and ought to be a great incentive to holiness of life, since transgression was expiated by so great a sacrifice. But was God cruel, unmerciful, unjust in accepting this voluntary suffering of Christ as an instrument of our salvation? No, certainly; this must not be admitted, unless it could be shewn, which never can be shewn, that our salvation could have been accomplished, and to the same extent, by other less valuable means—unless it could be shewn, which never can be shewn, that more evil than good, either to Christ himself, to the human race, or to some other part of God's creation, has flowed from the death of Christ. I like not that arrogant theology, which presumes to explore what *angels desire to look into*, and which failing in it's attempt, rejects as absurd what it is not able to understand.

If God thought fit to accept for our redemption any price, there is nothing, that we know of, but his own wisdom which could determine what price he would accept. Hence I see no difficulty in admitting, that the death of an angel, or of a mere man, might have been the price which God fixed upon. The *Socinians* contend that Christ was a man, who had no existence before he was born of Mary ; but they seem to me not to draw a just consequence, when from thence they infer, that an atonement could not have been made for the sins of mankind by the death of Jesus. The *Arians* maintain, that Jesus had an existence before he was born of Mary ; and there is no reason for thinking, that the death of such a being might not have made an atonement for the sins of mankind. All depends on the appointment of God ; and if, instead of the death of a super-angelic, of an angelic, or of an human being, God had fixed upon any other instrument, as a medium of restoring man to immortality, it would have been highly improper in us to have quarrelled with the mean which his goodness had appointed, merely because we could not see  
how

how it was fitted to attain the end. *God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life :—he sent him into the world to be a propitiation for our sins ; and it is our duty to believe that the death of Christ was the fittest ransom which could have been provided for our redemption, though we may not be able, from our great ignorance, fully to comprehend it's peculiar expediency.*

With great humility, and self-abasement, does it become us to think and speak of every dispensation of God ; we cannot fathom the depth of his councils, we cannot reach the sublimity of his designs, we cannot apprehend the wisdom of the means by which he worketh out the happiness of the universe. In fine, my brethren, it is our duty freely to examine the meaning of the words in which God has revealed his will, lest we should be led, by the authority of men, to adopt superstitious opinions as divine truths ; but it is not consistent with good sense to reject every thing which we cannot comprehend ; the extent of our intellectual capacity

capacity is extremely circumscribed, and we fall into a dangerous delusion, when we affect to make it commensurate with the wisdom of the Almighty ; *thinking ourselves to be something, when in fact we are nothing, we deceive ourselves, and lead others into error.*

F I N I S.



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