THE SPARKS
LIBRARY.
[AMERICA.]
Collected by
JARED SPARKS, LL. D.,
President of Harvard College.
Purchased by the Cornell University,
1872.
Summary view of the evidence and practice
The original of this book is in the Cornell University Library.

There are no known copyright restrictions in the United States on the use of the text.

http://www.archive.org/details/cu31924029374117
From the Author
with best respects
to the Rev. J. Sparks.
July 24: 1819.
A SUMMARY VIEW OF THE EVIDENCE AND PRACTICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE CHRISTIAN REVELATION; IN A SERIES OF DISCOURSES ADDRESSED TO YOUNG PERSONS, BY THOMAS BELSHAM, MINISTER OF THE UNITARIAN CHAPEL IN ESSEX STREET.

THE SECOND EDITION.

Quis possit indoctus, apta inter se, et cohaerentia fingere, cum philosophorum doctissimi, Plato et Aristoteles, et Epicurus, et Zeno, ipsi sibi repugnantia, et contraria dixerint? Hae est enim mendaciorum natura ut cohaerere non possint. Illorum autem traditio quia vera est quadrat undique, ac sibi tota consentit: et ideo persuadet quia constanti ratione suffulta est. LACTANTIUS, I. V.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD.
1809.
ADVERTISEMENT.

These Discourses contain the substance of a Course of Lectures delivered after the morning service to the young persons who attend unitarian worship at the chapel in Essex street. They are published at the request of many who heard them, and in hope that with a divine blessing, they may be the means of reviving the recollection of the evidences of the christian religion, of making them familiar to the mind, and of impressing them deeply upon the heart.

To this Summary of the evidences of christianity, it is the intention of the author to annex a Series of Discourses upon
the subject of Inspiration. Both together will constitute a general abstract of evidence in favour of rational christianity, which, it is hoped, will be sufficient to produce conviction in the minds of the candid and inquisitive, and to obviate the objections and cavils of modern infidelity, which in general are levelled more at the prevailing corruptions than at the essential doctrines, or the substantial evidences of revealed religion:

T. B.

Hackney, Jan. 19, 1807.
CONTENTS.

DISCOURSE I.

John vi. 68, 69.
Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe, and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the son of the living God. . . . . . . . . Page 1.

DISCOURSE II.
Direct historical Evidence of the Christian Revelation.

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us: even as they delivered them to us, who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word: it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things, from the very first; to write unto thee, in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed. . . . . . . . . . . Page 31.
CONTENTS.

DISCOURSE III.
Prophetic and Internal Evidence of the Christian Revelation.

JOHN XX. 31.
But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God: and that, believing, ye might have life through his name. ... ... ... Page 74.

DISCOURSE IV.
Evidence of the Christian Revelation from the Testimony of the Jewish Scriptures.

LUKE xxiv. 27.
And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. ... ... ... ... ... ... Page 109.

DISCOURSE V.
The practical Value of the Christian Revelation.

TITUS ii. 11—14.
For, the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, even the glorious appearance of the great God, and of our saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works. Page 159.
DISCOURSE VI.

The Subserviency of Knowledge to Virtue.

Introductory to a Course of Lectures upon the Christian Scriptures.

JOHN xvii. 3.

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.

Page 180.
John, vi. 68, 69.

Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe, and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.

It is hardly probable that the apostle Peter, eager and zealous as he was, would have expressed himself with so much confidence concerning the messiahship of Jesus, considering the reserve which Jesus himself usually maintained upon this subject, and especially after a discourse so uncommonly offensive to Jewish prejudices, in which our
Lord had most explicitly disclaimed all temporal authority, and by which he had occasioned many who had followed him from secular views to retire in disgust. Accordingly, the reading of the most approved copies is this:—"We believe, and are sure, that thou art the holy one, or the holy prophet of God": a declaration much more suitable to the state of the apostle's mind in the circumstances in which it was made.

"We believe, and are sure, that thou art the holy prophet of God." Happy they who upon just grounds can adopt this language of unhesitating confidence; and who in consequence of this firm conviction can maintain a regard to Christ and his doctrine as habitual, and as influential, as if Jesus himself were visibly present; and the great objects of faith, the concerns of a future and everlasting world, were objects of sense! This however is a state of mind which few serious and inquisitive persons

---

This is the reading of the Vatican, the Ephrem, and the Cambridge manuscripts, and is admitted by Griesbach into his text.
are able to reach. The utmost which the generality of sober and rational inquirers can expect, is to attain a faith; not perhaps wholly unmixed with doubt, and a hope, not entirely unclouded with fear; but at the same time, a faith so decidedly preponderant as to lay a reasonable foundation for virtuous practice, and a hope so habitual and encouraging, as to fill the mind with joy and peace in believing, and to administer the best consolation under the vicissitudes of life. Here, we walk by faith, not by sight. And if they were peculiarly happy who believed in Jesus because they had seen him after his resurrection; a proportionable blessing belongs to those, who being destitute of sensible evidence, have, in consequence of due and impartial inquiry, admitted the divine mission of Jesus, and have bowed their spirits to his gentle yoke.

This, my young friends, has been the state of mind to which it has been my endeavour to form, you, by that course of lectures upon the evidences of revealed re-
ligion which I have lately addressed to you. It has been my desire in the first place, that you should know what true christianity is, separate from all adventitious mixtures, and doctrines of human invention. And next, that you should be christians not merely by education, by prejudice, by interest, or by fashion, but upon just principles: and that your faith may be fixed upon a foundation too solid, and too deep, to be shaken or endangered, by the scoffs and scorns, by the artifices or the arguments, of modern scepticism. In the proportion in which this object has been accomplished, my main design has been answered, and my best wishes have been fulfilled. For of this truth I cannot for a moment entertain a doubt, that to be a rational and a practical believer in the christian religion, is to be truly wise, and virtuous, and happy.

What I now propose is, to give a brief recapitulation of the principal evidences of the christian religion, which may be of use to refresh the memory of those who have honoured the lectures with their attendance, and which, I trust, will not be unaccepta-
ble to others, who need no information which it is in my power to communicate.

To believe in the Christian revelation, is to believe that Jesus of Nazareth, the greatest of all the prophets of God, was commissioned by God to reveal the doctrine of a future life in which virtue will find a correspondent reward, and vice shall suffer condign punishment; and, that of this commission he gave satisfactory evidence, by his resurrection from the dead.

He who believes these few plain and simple facts, is a speculative Christian; he who publicly avows this belief, is a professed Christian; he who regulates his temper and conduct by an habitual regard to these important principles, is a practical Christian: he who does not believe that Jesus was commissioned to teach the doctrine of eternal life, or who denies his resurrection from the dead, is not a Christian. He may, for any thing that appears, be a learned man, a wise man, and a good man; but he cannot, in propriety of language, be called a
definition: The apostle Paul tells the Corinthians that he had himself delivered to them among the first principles, that Christ died, that he was buried, and that he rose again on the third day; from which he infers that there must be a resurrection of the dead; for that "if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen, and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain."

The promulgation of Christianity is an event which took place upwards of seventeen hundred years ago, and the credibility of this fact rests principally upon the evidence of testimony. Testimony is a species of evidence which is not intrinsically, and in its naked form, so satisfactory and cogent as the evidence of consciousness, of sense, of intuition, or of demonstration, and it is often fallacious. But in certain circumstances it is a safe and infallible guide. If the person who relates a fact be neither himself deceived, nor an intentional deceiver, his testimony must be true. By far the
greater number of facts which men believe, are supported by testimony alone: and this species of evidence is not only sufficient to regulate the conduct of men in the common affairs of life, but is admitted as competent in the most solemn judicial proceedings; upon occasions of the greatest importance, and even where the lives and happiness of millions are dependent upon the decision. In fact, a person who should seriously refuse in all circumstances to give credit to testimony, would be justly regarded and treated as a lunatic.

It has been contended that revelation is unnecessary and inexpedient, and therefore, to divine wisdom, morally impossible: for that the law of nature is so perfect as to admit of no addition or improvement, and that the light of nature is so distinct and universal as to need no assistance. Now, though it may perhaps be admitted, that the law of nature, considered as the universal rule of right, is absolutely perfect, it will not be gratuitously

3 Theology, Christianity as old as the Creation.
conceded that it would be easy, or practicable, by the unassisted light of reason only, to form just conceptions of the attributes, character and government of God, or of the requisitions and sanctions of his moral law.—But the proper reply to this intrepid assertion is, by a direct appeal to plain and palpable fact. What has the light of nature actually accomplished, unaided by divine revelation? What has it discovered of the attributes of God, of the rule of duty, or of the doctrine of a future life? The errors into which the most celebrated of the ancient philosophers have fallen, in their profound and laborious investigations of moral subjects, have been gross and pitiable in the extreme. And that man must have no common share of confidence in his own talents and sagacity, who would expect to succeed where Socrates, and Plato, and Cicero, have failed 4.

4 See upon this subject, Cicero de Natura Deorum, and Tusculan. Quest. lib. I. Also Plato's Phædo. Dr. Le- land's learned work, on the Advantage and Necessity of Divine Revelation, and Dr. Priestley on the Doctrines of the Heathen Philosophy compared with those of Revelation, are highly worthy of a serious perusal.
Previous to our inquiry into the direct evidence of the Christian revelation, it will be necessary to form a correct judgement concerning the nature, the use, and the evidence of miracles. A MIRACLE, is a DEVIATION FROM THE ESTABLISHED COURSE OF NATURE: it is a violation of the laws by which the world is usually governed. No person can be a believer in a divine revelation, without believing a miracle. It is the communication of a doctrine to the mind which it either could not, or would not, have attained by the exercise of its natural powers. And revelation appeals to miracle as the proper, and absolute proof, of its divine authority. "The works which I do in my Father's name," saith our Lord, "bear witness of me." Concerning miracles we may observe,

---

5 See upon this subject, as a general reference, Mr. Farmer's Dissertation upon Miracles. This judicious and learned work having been long out of print, a very correct edition of it, in a smaller and cheaper form, has been reprinted by the Unitarian Society.

6 John, x. 25. 38. xiv. 10. 14.
1. That a miracle is a fact capable of being distinguished from other unusual and extraordinary events.

There may indeed be real miracles which are not sensible miracles, because the course of nature in the case supposed may not be known, or the deviation from it may not be perceived. But in some cases, the course of nature is obvious to the most superficial observer, so that a deviation from it would be apparent to a person of the meanest capacity. For example, that a man should rise from the dead after the putrefactive process is begun:—that five thousand persons, and more, should be fed with a few loaves and fishes:—that limbs should be instantaneously restored to the maimed, sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf; and that a tempest should be calmed by a word.

2. God alone is the author of miracles; and no inferior agent can perform a miracle without his express authority and permission.
This is a very important preliminary consideration, and absolutely necessary to be established before we can appeal to miracles as proper proofs of divine interposition. The laws of nature are the wise and benevolent appointment of the Creator for the benefit of his creatures, whose existence and comfort depend upon their permanence and invariable regularity. It is not therefore to be imagined that he would permit any inferior being to controul them at pleasure.—It has also been the opinion of many of the wisest and best philosophers, that the laws of nature are not only the appointment, but the actual agency, and immediate energy, of the divine Being himself, exerting itself according to certain stated rules, which infinite wisdom has prescribed. But upon this supposition

---


Sir Isaac Newton thought it most unaccountable to exclude the Deity only out of the universe. It appeared to him much more just and reasonable to suppose that the whole chain of causes or the several series of them should centre in him as their source, and the whole system appear depending on him, the
it is absolutely impossible for any inferior agent to alter, or suspend, the laws of nature, for that would be to control, and counteract Omnipotence itself; which is a contradiction in the very terms.

Further, though we have reason to believe that there are ranks and gradations of being in the universe, so that some beings may possess powers of intellect and action beyond conception superior to others, it by no means follows that it is within the power of any to control the laws of nature, or to perform any action out of the proper sphere to which they are limited by the wisdom and benevolence of the Creator.


However far mechanism may be carried, and the chain of causes extend in the material universe; to the divine power, exerted continually in all places, every law and every effect and motion in it must at last be resolved. This is a conclusion which the modern improvements in natural philosophy have abundantly confirmed, and which some of the first and best philosophers have received. Dr. Price, ibid. p. 51.

His power is the very life and soul of every thing which ex-
Moreover, there is no historical evidence to prove that any miracles were ever wrought by any beings whatever, of which God was not the immediate author. Who now gives credit to the absurd tales of witchcraft, and magic, and necromancy? who now believes that the heathen oracles were inspired to foretell future events? who is now so weak as to be imposed upon by the silly legends of the popish saints?—Nor does the scripture history when judiciously interpreted give any countenance to the popular opinion that miracles may be wrought by inferior agents without the permission and express appointment of the Supreme. The pretended miracles of the Egyptian magicians were jugglers' tricks; as such they are described by the historian himself, and for these the Egyptians were ever famous, and are so to this day. The supposed appearance of Samuel to Saul at Endor was the artifice of a practised ven-

* Farmer on Miracles, chap. iv. sect. 1.
The temptation of Christ was unquestionably a visionary scene intended as the vehicle of important instruction: and the introduction of the devil into this scenical representation, no more proves the existence of such a powerful and malignant

---

9 Farmer on Miracles, chap. iv. sect. 2. Dr. Chandler's Life of David, book ii. chap. 16. Mr. Farmer supposes this to have been a real miracle, and that the ghost or image of Samuel actually appeared to Saul to denounce the divine judgement against him. But it is highly improbable that God would give an answer to Saul when seeking it in this irregular manner, after having refused to answer him in the customary way, by the oracle, or by a prophet. Dr. Chandler's hypothesis therefore is much more likely to be true, that the woman was an impostor and ventriloquist. The principal difficulty arises from the answer given to Saul by the supposed Samuel, which it is said contains a prediction of an event which an impostor could not have foreseen. But it did not occur to these learned writers that probably the only witness of the fact after the decease of Saul was the witch herself, who would no doubt relate the story in a manner the most favourable to her own credit and that of her profession.

10 See Mr. Farmer's Inquiry into Christ's Temptation in the Wilderness, a most ingenious, and, I think, satisfactory treatise upon a very difficult subject. A new edition of this tract has also been published by the Unitarian Society. If any intelligent reader desires to be convinced of the impossibility of the literal account of this transaction, he may consult Dr. Chandler's laborious and learned vindication of it—Chandler's Sermons, vol. iii. No. 7, 8.
spirit as the devil is commonly represented to be, than the symbolical figures in the apocalyptic vision, prove that such figures must have an external archetype.

Finally, the demoniacs of the gospels were not, as the ancients weakly imagined, possessed and agitated by human ghosts, nor yet, as moderns have still more absurdly fabled, by evil angels, and apostate spirits, but were patients labouring under the dreadful maladies of lunacy and epilepsy, to many of whom the compassion of Jesus applied his healing power. Upon the whole therefore, we come with confidence to the important conclusion—that no being in the universe ever did, or ever could, control the laws of nature, but that Being who was himself the author of nature, and of them.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{11}}\text{This point seems to be proved beyond all dispute, and the question is set at rest for ever with all thinking and unprejudiced persons by Mr. Farmer in his admirable, learned and judicious Essay on the Demoniacs of the New Testament, which has likewise lately been republished by the Unitarian Society.}\]
3. Hence it follows that miracles, in certain circumstances, are proper and absolute proofs of the mission, and the doctrine of a prophet.

When a doctrine is proposed, or a mission is asserted, and a miracle, or a series of miracles, is performed, and appealed to, as evidence of the divine authority of the teacher or prophet, this proof must be admitted as just and satisfactory; for to work a miracle in such circumstances is, as it were, to set the seal of God himself to the commission of the prophet: for it can never be supposed that in such circumstances God would interpose immediately to authenticate a fraud.

4. It is very material to the present question to remark that miracles are facts provable by human testimony.

For a miracle is a possible event. But the falsehood of testimony in certain circumstances is absolutely impossible. There-
fore, a miracle may be proved by testimony.

"But," says an ingenious sceptic, "no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that the falsehood of it would be more miraculous than the event it endeavours to establish." This writer's expression is inaccurate. One miracle cannot be more miraculous than another. But instead of miraculous, substitute incredible, and I join issue with the writer upon his own principles. I will not believe even the resurrection of Jesus, the great foundation of Christian hope, unless the testimony in its favour be of such a kind, that the falsehood of it would be more incredible than the miracle "which it endeavours to establish." For in the first place the antecedent impro-

---

10 Hume's Essay on Miracles, part i. Excellent answers have been published to this subtle objection of Mr. Hume's by Dr. Adams of Oxford, Dr. Campbell of Aberdeen, Dr. Price in his Dissertations, Dr. Priestley in his Institutes of Revealed Religion, chap. ii. sect. 8, and Dr. Paley in his View of the Evidences of Christianity, p. 1—15.
bability of this event, considered in its peculiar circumstances, is not so great as may at first be supposed. It is not incredible, it is not unworthy of the divine character, that the wise and benevolent parent of mankind should interpose to rescue his human offspring from ignorance, and vice, and misery; it is not incredible, that he should send a messenger to reveal the doctrine of a future life, and to teach men the way of salvation; it is not incredible, that the credentials of this divine messenger should be authenticated by miraculous powers; it is not incredible, that the first teacher of a future life should be enabled to confirm, and to exemplify his doctrine, by his resurrection from the dead, than which, no evidence can be conceived that would be better adapted to meet the objections, to dispel the fears, and to elevate and confirm the expectations of the anxious and inquisitive mind. And, after all these deductions from the antecedent incredibility of the event, the christian apologist pledges himself to produce evidence, which, in the estimation of a candid and impartial judge,
shall be more than sufficient to counterbalance the difficulties which remain. This is the evidence which we now proceed to investigate.

The evidence of the truth, and divine authority, of the Christian religion may be arranged under five general heads. The **philosophical** evidence, the direct **historical**, the **prophetic**, the **internal**, and finally, the evidence which is derived from the testimony of the **Jewish scriptures**. Each of these arguments, considered separately, carries great weight; but collectively, and taken in their mutual connexion, and correspondence with each other, the evidence to a serious, candid, and unprejudiced inquirer must be little less than irresistible.

First. The **philosophical argument** assumes the truth of the Christian religion as a hypothesis, the admission of
which, is necessary to account for certain obvious and undisputed phænomena; it is the only assignable, and adequate cause, of certain known effects. In other words, certain facts of public notoriety, are upon record, the existence of which cannot be explained upon any other supposition than that the christian religion is true, and of divine original.

The facts are these: That, christianity had its origin in Judea in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar: that, the founder of this religion was Jesus of Nazareth, a crucified Jew: that, the christian doctrine at its first promulgation, was the object of general abhorrence and contempt: that, the professors, and especially, the publishers of it, were exposed to the most cruel persecution: that, notwithstanding this, the cause prevailed; the novel and obnoxious doctrine was avowed by multitudes, and spread, with astonishing rapidity, through all the provinces of the Roman empire: that, in the reign of Nero, in less than forty years from the first publication of christianity,
the number of christians at Rome was so considerable as to attract the notice and jealousy of the government, and to expose them to an imperial persecution¹⁴: and finally, that in the reign of Trajan, at the commencement of the second century, the christians were so numerous in a populous province of the lesser Asia, that the pro-consul himself, in a letter to the emperor, which is still extant, complains, that the heathen temples were almost deserted¹⁵.

These facts, which are undeniable, must have an adequate cause; and the cause which christianity assigns is, that, Jesus of Nazareth was a prophet, and a messenger of God: that, he wrought miracles to establish his divine commission: that, though he was crucified and put to death by his enemies, he was raised to life again on the third day: that, he ascended to his Father: that, shortly afterwards, he communicated to his apostles, and others, the

¹⁴ Tacit. Ann. 1. xv. c. 44.
promised gift of the holy spirit, by which they were enabled to preach the truth with freedom and courage, to speak languages which they had never learned, to perform a great variety of signal and incontestable miracles, and to communicate miraculous gifts and powers to their primitive converts. Admitting these facts, you have an easy solution of this difficult, and extraordinary problem. Here is, indeed, a most splendid and uncommon effect, but here is also, an extraordinary, and an adequate cause. If the "hand of the Lord" so evidently accompanied the preachers of the gospel, it is no longer wonderful, that "the word of God grew and prevailed, and that multitudes believed and turned to the Lord," were converted to the christian faith, and persevered in their profession with undaunted fortitude.

But, if this supposition be denied, no other cause can be assigned, which shall be adequate to this marvellous effect. No one will pretend that the christian religion made its way by the same means by
which false religions have generally succeeded. Christianity was not the religion of the civil magistrate, nor of the priest, nor of the military, nor of the philosopher, nor of the vulgar. It did not accommodate itself to men's prejudices, nor flatter them in their vices. If the facts which Christians have always assigned as the foundation of their faith, and which it is known that all Christians, in all ages, have believed, are not admitted, it must be supposed, that a great number of people on a sudden, and without any reason, upwards of seventeen hundred years ago, took it into their heads to believe, that they were eye-witnesses to many miracles which never actually happened, that they were even themselves the subjects of miraculous operations which they never experienced, and that they actually possessed supernatural powers which were never communicated to them, and, that they persuaded thousands of other persons to believe the same: and, in consequence of these strange illusions of the imagination, to embrace and to pro-
fess a religion the most contrary to their inveterate and most cherished prejudices, the profession of which exposed them to hatred, insult, and the most malignant persecution. If only a few persons had acted in this manner, and if the effect had been temporary, and limited to a particular place or vicinage, it might have been regarded as a case of local and occasional insanity. But in this instance, the numbers are too great, and the effect too extensive and permanent, to admit for a moment, the supposition of a natural and epidemical derangement of intellect. Such a phænomenon must have been a proper miracle; a supernatural phrensy, impelling hundreds and thousands of all ages and ranks, and in various and distant countries, to believe that they saw, and heard; and felt, and performed, miraculous operations, which were never seen, or heard, or done, and in consequence of this persuasion, to embrace a new system of faith, to form new habits of life, and to expose themselves to a thousand perils in
the profession and propagation of their new religion. Here then, is a great, and stupendous miracle, or rather a mass of miracles, of which God alone could have been the Author. And for what purpose were they wrought?—To bear testimony, and to ensure success, to an impious and mischievous imposture. We see the wretched dilemma to which scepticism is reduced. This miracle, the existence of which must be admitted, if christianity is false, is infinitely more incredible than the resurrection of Christ, and, than all the miracles upon which the christian religion rests for its support: and therefore, by concession of the adversaries themselves, upon the very principle laid down by the leader of modern scepticism, the resurrection of Jesus must be received as true: and the christian religion is of divine original.

To this whole argument another unbeliever, not less celebrated 16, objects, that

---

16 Gibbon's History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, chap. xv, xvi. In reply to Mr. Gibbon's objection
the premises are not true, and that if they were admitted, the conclusion would not follow. The christian religion we are told did not advance with that rapidity, nor prevail to that extent, which is generally believed, and that its reception to the degree in which it actually succeeded may be sufficiently accounted for by the operation of natural causes.

In reply to this writer's ingenious calculations, from which he endeavours to prove, that the christian religion made a slow and very limited progress in the Roman empire, we oppose the stubborn facts alleged, not by christian rhetoricians, but by writers of the highest reputation, and of undoubted authority, who viewed the christian religion with an eye not more favourable than that of the learned historian himself, and who expressly assert, that in

see Mr. H. Taylor's Thoughts on the grand Apostasy: Dr. Priestley's History of the Corruptions of Christianity, Conclusion, part i. and Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, part ii. letter 16. Also, the Bishop of Landaff's admirable Apology for Christianity, in Letters to Edward Gibbon. Esq.
the reign of Nero a vast multitude of christians were found at Rome \(^\text{17}\), and, that in the reign of Trajan, they almost out-numbered the idolaters in Bithynia \(^\text{18}\).

The natural causes which this writer assigns as adequate to account for the progress and prevalence of the christian religion are, the intolerant, but not unsocial zeal of the primitive christians, the expectation of a future life, and of the immediate appearance of Christ to judgement, the

\(^\text{17}\) Igitur primo correpti qui fatebantur, deinde, indicio eorum multitudo ingens, haud perinde in crimine incendii, quam odio humani generis convicti sunt. Tacit. Ann. l. xv. c. 44.

\(^\text{18}\) Neque enim civitates tantum, sed vicos etiam, et agros, superstitionis istius contagio pervagata est. Quae videtur sisti et corrigi posse. Certe satis constat prope etiam desolata templum cepisse celebrari, et sacra solennia diu intermissa repeti. Passimque venire victimas, quarum adhuc rarissimus emptor inveniebatur. Plin, Epp. l. x. ep. 97. The emperor Trajan in his rescript, orders that christians, when convicted, should be punished, but forbids them to be sought for. — "The genuineness of these letters," says Dr. Lardner, "is unquestioned. They are found with the other letters of Pliny to Trajan, and Trajan's letters to him. And they are both particularly mentioned by Tertullian in his Apology for the Christians, and by Eusebius from him, not to mention later writers." Lardner's Works, vol. vii. p. 291.
miraculous powers ascribed to the early believers, the pure and austere morals of the christians, and the union and discipline of the christian republic. That some of these causes operated in a considerable degree to promote the progress of christianity, especially after miraculous powers were withdrawn, may perhaps be granted. But these causes are themselves effects, which require a sufficient cause. Whence arose this firm unhesitating faith, whence this inflexible and intrepid zeal, whence these pure and austere morals which distinguished the primitive believers? Whence the celebrated union and harmony, the strict, and if you please, the severe, and rigid discipline of the christian church? Grant that christianity is true, and the difficulties vanish. But deny the facts which all christians believe, and you leave a mighty effect without an adequate cause 19. If the

19 "If (says Dr. Priestley) with such miserable advocates and such insufficient arguments, christianity had, as Mr. Gibbon says, diffused itself over the Roman empire, so early as the time of Seneca, it will not be very easy for him to account for so extraordinary a fact. Here is a great effect, without
Christian religion be not true, if Christ did not die and rise again, if his apostles were not endued with extraordinary and supernatural powers, the zeal of the primitive christians would have been irrational and contemptible, their pretensions to miracles ridiculous, the strictness of their morals and the severity of their discipline would have deterred unbelievers from joining their community; and christianity, like other impostures, unsupported by the civil power, must soon have died away. But the reverse of this is an acknowledged fact. The christian religion continued, by its own unassisted energy, to advance and to establish itself in the world, till, in the any adequate cause. Yet this does not appear to have struck our philosopher, as any thing extraordinary. It satisfies him, that some thousands of people took it into their heads, without any reason at all, that Christ and the apostles wrought miracles, that they madly devoted their labours, their fortunes, and their lives, to the propagation of their groundless opinion, and that by their inflexible zeal, and obstinacy, they forced the belief of it on the rest of the world. Such is the philosophy of Mr. Gibbon, and of other unbelievers."

Dr. Priestley's Letter to a Philosophical Unbeliever, part ii. p. 208.
end, all opposition gave way, and, the demonology of heathenism vanished before the splendour of revealed truth. If then that principle be just which is the foundation of all reasoning upon physical and moral subjects, that every effect must have an adequate cause, the rapid progress and final success of the Christian religion, demonstrated beyond contradiction, the truth of its doctrine, and the divinity of its original.
DISCOURSE II.

DIRECT HISTORICAL EVIDENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN REVELATION.

LUKE, i. 1—4.

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us: even as they delivered them to us, who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word: it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things, from the very first; to write unto thee, in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed.

We may observe here, upon what grounds the sacred historian rests the credit of his narrative: not upon those of plenary inspiration, or divine suggestion, but upon the common foundation of direct historical evidence, the evidence of those who were actually present to the facts which they relate. Many, it seems, had undertaken to prepare an account of the
principal facts relating to Jesus, and his doctrine. These memoirs were probably correct as far as they went, and both Luke, and the other evangelists, appear to have freely availed themselves of them 1. This accounts for a circumstance which it would otherwise be difficult to explain, namely, that the same facts are sometimes related by two, or even by three, of the evangelists, in nearly the same words; which proves that they all borrowed from

1 Of this fact no reasonable person can doubt, who reads Dr. Marsh's Dissertation on the Origin and Composition of the three first canonical Gospels, annexed to the fourth volume of his Translation of Michaelis's Introduction to the New Testament, whether he may, or may not entirely accede to the learned writer's own ingenious solution of the difficult problem. Much is the English theological reader indebted to this gentleman for his translation of Michaelis's invaluable work, especially, so far as he has enriched the original with the addition of his own accurate and instructive commentary and notes. It must be the earnest wish of every theological student, that this learned writer would complete what he has so ably begun, and that he would continue his commentary to the end of Michaelis's work. I cannot forbear adding, that it would be a most desirable accession to English biblical literature, if some scholar equally qualified, if such there be, would perform the same office for Eichhorn, which Dr. Marsh has performed for Michaelis.
the same sources, though each has added some material circumstances which the others have omitted. These original records seem, however, to have been deficient both in matter and in method: they were probably desultory memoirs rather than connected histories; and therefore this evangelist, the friend and companion of the apostle Paul, and well known to the other apostles, having had access to the best sources of information, and having been very diligent in his inquiries, undertook to compose an accurate and methodical account of the most important circumstances in the history of Christ. This narrative he inscribes to his friend and patron Theophilus, whom he addresses by the title of Excellency, being, probably, a person of high rank, and perhaps a Roman senator, and praefect of a province. The professed de-

---

9 This is the opinion of Theophiltact and Æcumeneius. See Lardner's History of the Apostles and Evangelists, chap. viii. sect. 8. Michaelis inclines to the opinion of Theodore Hase, published in the Bibliotheca Bremensis, that Theophilus was a Jewish high-priest mentioned by Josephus, Antiq. i. xviii, xix, xx, the son of Annas, who was high-priest when Christ was crucified. Marsh's Michaelis, vol. iii. chap. vi. sect. 4.
sign of the evangelist is, to confirm this eminent person in the belief of those important facts, which lie at the foundation of the truth, and of the divine authority of the christian religion.

And, as christianity is a rational system, proposed to men as reasonable creatures, offering itself to the most rigorous and impartial examination, and requiring assent no further than it is supported by competent evidence; and, as the subject of it is of the highest importance, it surely becomes every reasonable person, to whom the expectation of a future life is an interesting concern, to investigate the question thoroughly, candidly, and impartially, and to establish his faith upon firm and solid grounds. It is upon these principles, and with these views, that I am endeavouring to excite the attention of young persons in particular, to the evidences of the christian revelation.

The arguments in favour of the christian religion have been arranged under five
different heads; the philosophical, the direct historical, the prophetic, the internal, and the testimony borne to the divine mission and doctrine of Christ by the Jewish scriptures.

The philosophical argument states a series of public and undeniable facts, and assumes the truth of the Christian history, and the divine authority of the Christian religion, as the only assignable and adequate cause. This has been discussed in the preceding discourse; and I now advance,

Secondly, to state, and illustrate the direct historical evidence of the Christian revelation.

This argument first establishes the genuineness and the credibility of the books of the New Testament, and from these premises, it infers the truth and divine authority of the Christian religion.

1. The books of the New Testament are
in the main *genuine*; they were probably written by the persons to whom they are ascribed, and certainly in, or near, the apostolic age. They contain an authentic account of facts, and doctrines which were currently believed by christians at the time when they were written, and, with the exception of the prefaces of Matthew and Luke, which are rather additions to the story, than corruptions of the text, they are free from all material and wilful interpolation, or mutilation, but such as are common to compositions of equal antiquity, and which may be, in a considerable degree, amended and supplied by liberal and judicious criticism.

The collection of books to which the word New Testament is applied, were written by different authors, at different times, in different places, and upon different occasions, and the evidence of the genuineness of these books is proportionably different; and in this respect, they are, in a great measure, independent of each other, so that the genuineness of one may be
clear, and indisputable, while that of another, is problematical, and obscure. A learned ecclesiastical historian, of the fourth century, who took great pains to arrive at truth, who possessed many important means of information, which are no longer extant, and who appears to have conducted his inquiries with great judgement and impartiality, informs us, that as far as he could learn, the genuineness of some of these books had never been called in question, but that the genuineness of others had been controverted by the earlier writers. The undisputed books

3 Eusebius bishop of Cesarea, the friend of Constantine the great.
5 The distinction made by the ancient writers, between the ἡμολογομένα, those books of scripture which were universally received, and the ἀντιλεγομένα, which were disputed, among which were some, which are now generally allowed to be genuine, proves that books were not admitted into the canon of apostolical writings without due and impartial previous examination. The epistle of Barnabas, though it bears the name of an apostle, and though its claim is admitted by some moderns, and even by Dr. Lardner himself, is by Eusebius classed with the νόθα, or spurious books.

It would be very proper that this distinction should be at-
were the four Gospels, and the Acts of the apostles, all the epistles of Paul, which bear his name, the first epistle of Peter, and the first epistle of John. The books whose authenticity had been controverted were, the epistle to the Hebrews, the epistle of James, the second epistle of Peter, the second and third of John, the epistle of Jude, and the book of Revelations. I see no reason to deviate from this ancient classification of the sacred books, and I think that the books which were regarded as genuine, in the fourth century, may justly be regarded as such at present; nor have any of the arguments which have late-

tended to, in our common editions of the New Testament.

"The canon," says Dr. Lardner, "should consist of two classes. In the first should be those books which Eusebius assures us were then universally acknowledged, and had been all along received by all catholic christians. These only should be of the highest authority, from which doctrines of religion may be proved. In the other class should be put books of which Eusebe speaks as contradicted in his time, though well known. These should be reckoned doubtful. They should be allowed to be publicly read in christian assemblies, but not be alleged as affording, alone, sufficient proof of any doctrine." Lardner's History, chap. ii. sect. 4.
ly been advanced⁶, to invalidate the authenticity of three of the gospels, and some of the epistles, however ingenious, operated conviction upon my mind in opposition to the unanimous voice of Christian antiquity. Nor do I indeed see any sufficient reason for excluding from the canon⁷ any of the books which are commonly admitted into it, excepting, perhaps, the epistle of Jude, which is very short, and of no great importance, and which appears to me, to contain some things which are unworthy of an apostle of Christ. The book of Revelations, as a prophetic volume must rest upon its own peculiar evidence, that of accomplished

⁶ By the late learned and excellent Edward Evanson, in a work entitled The Dissonance of the Evangelists, the design of which is to prove that Luke's is the only history which is genuine and credible; a work which I have repeatedly perused with attention, but from which, however I may admire the industry, the ingenuity, and the exemplary integrity of the writer, I can derive no conviction in opposition to the uniform testimony of Christian antiquity.

⁷ By the canon, I mean books written by the apostles, or by companions of the apostles.
prophecy. After all, it is by no means essential to the validity even of the historical evidence, to establish the genuineness of every book of the New Testament. It would be sufficient for this purpose to take them even at the lowest estimate. The combined testimony of Luke and Paul is amply sufficient to establish the credibility of the gospel history. It would, however, be pusillanimous to abandon any of the evangelical writings which are capable of a just and satisfactory defence.

To prove the genuineness of the books of the New Testament in general, it has been observed,

1. That the majority of these books profess to have been written by apostles, or, by men who were companions of the apostles, and who possessed the best means of information, being themselves either eye-witnesses of the facts, or parties concerned, or deriving their intelligence from
those who were so. The epistles of Peter and Paul are introduced, with their own names: the writer of the gospel and of the epistle attributed to John, represents himself as giving an account of that which he had seen and heard, and which his hands had handled of the word of life: and Luke describes himself as the companion of Paul, in his labours and his journeys. This is presumptive evidence of the fact, and not to be rejected without sufficient reason.

2. The style, and language of the New Testament, and the innumerable allusions to local customs, and to facts both public and private, are strong internal proofs, that the books were written in the age and country to which they are referred, and by persons of the character, and description, to whom they are ascribed. None but Jews, contemporaries with Christ, and residing in or near Judea at the time, could have been so familiar with the manners, customs, and language of the Jews, and with the actual state of
things in Palestine, and the adjacent countries.

3. There has been a succession of writers from the apostolic age, by whom the books of the New Testament have been cited as genuine, and authentic; who have given them the same titles, and ascribed them to the same persons, that Christians now do; and it appears by their numerous quotations from them, that the contents of their books were the same as ours. No classic author, how well known and popular so ever, has been cited so frequently and fully as the books of the New Testament.


9 This is the direct and proper evidence of the genuineness of any ancient writings. We admit the Commentaries to have been written by Cæsar, and the Æneid by Virgil, because they are uniformly cited as the works of those authors by writers of succeeding ages. This argument applies to the books of the New Testament; and Dr. Paley justly remarks, “that in the number, variety, and early date of our testimonies, we far exceed all other ancient books.” This argument is distinctly
4. The most acute, the most learned, and the most inveterate enemies of the Christian religion in former ages, have admitted the genuineness of the books of the New Testament, and have framed their arguments against the Christian religion, upon the supposition that these records were authentic documents of the Christian faith.

5. These books were early translated into different languages; they were read publicly in Christian assemblies; they were exhaustively stated, illustrated, and even exhausted by Dr. Lardner, in his learned and immortal work, on the Credibility of the Gospel History, which contains an account of Christian writers to the beginning of the twelfth century, with their testimony to the books of the New Testament. This argument is judiciously abridged and represented by Dr. Paley, in the first volume of his admirable View of the Evidences of Christianity, with the addition of many valuable remarks in that excellent writer's terse and impressive style.

Celsus in the second century, Porphyry in the third, and the emperor Julian, all of them men of learning and acuteness, and bitter enemies to the Christian religion, allow the genuineness of the books of the New Testament. See Lardner's Jewish and Heathen Testimonies to Christianity; and Paley, vol. i. c. x. sect. 9.
pounded; commentaries were written upon them, and harmonies were compiled; sects the most opposite to each other concurred in the use of them, and appealed to them in support of their respective tenets: and before the end of the second century they were diffused through every part of the known world.

6. Catalogues of the books of the New

11 See Lardner's History of Heretics. Paley, ibid. sect. 7. Many apocryphal books were forged in the three first centuries, bearing the names of the apostles, of which a great number are cited or alluded to by the ancient ecclesiastical writers. Toland, in his Amyntor, pretends that they are represented by those writers as of equal authority with the books of the New Testament, and ought to be admitted into the canon of scripture. Mr. Jeremiah Jones, an eminent nonconformist minister in the beginning of the last century, a relation and pupil of the learned Samuel Jones of Tewkesbury, the tutor of Secker and Butler, of Maddox and Chandler, undertook to confute this assertion of Toland's, by a complete induction of all the passages of the christian writers in the four first centuries, in which they notice apocryphal writings. This gave occasion to his celebrated treatise on the Method of settling the Canon of the New Testament, a work of great judgement and profound erudition, which, having become very scarce, was lately (to the credit of the liberality of the university of Oxford) reprinted at the Clarendon press.
Testament have been drawn up by ancient writers which in the main agree with ours 12: and many manuscript copies of the New Testament, some of them of very great antiquity, are still extant in the original Greek, and in other languages, and in different and distant countries, which in the main agree with each other; so that, upon the whole, the genuineness of all, and it may be said of almost every book of the New Testament, is substantiated by evidence superior to that of any other ancient writings, without excepting those the genuineness of which is most indubitable.

II. It remains now to prove that the history is credible.

And in the first place, it is self-evident that the writers could not be themselves deceived.

12 Thirteen catalogues are collected by Mr. Jones, from the writers of the first four centuries, all of which very nearly agree with what are now received: but some omit the Apocalypse. Jones on the Canon, part i. c. 8.
Matthew was an apostle: Mark was the companion of Peter and Paul, and his history was an abridgement of Matthew's. Luke professes to have had the best information, and was unquestionably the companion of Paul, in his various journeys, and during his imprisonment at Rome: Paul was an apostle, and himself a principal party in the transactions which he describes: John, and James, and Peter were apostles and companions of Christ; they heard his discourses, and saw his miracles. These men must have known whether what they wrote were real facts; and if their narrations are false they must have deliberately intended to falsify, and to impose upon the credulity of their readers.

Secondly, they were not deceivers.

As far as we can judge from the little which we know of their history, they ap-

---

13 This however is contested by the learned. See Michaelis, vol. iii. and Marsh's Dissertation.

14 See upon this subject Simpson's internal and presumptive Evidences of Christianity, part iii.
pear to have been honest and conscientious men, who would not have been inclined to deceive, if it had been in their power. Nor had they talents to have forged such a narrative as this, and to have imposed it upon the world, if they had been so inclined.

They had no conceivable motive to have induced them to attempt so strange a fraud. They could not have expected either fame or fortune as the reward of their dishonesty: they must have been idiots in understanding, if they were not aware, that, by inventing such a wicked and impious tale, and becoming the active propagandists of so unpopular a religion, they exposed themselves to universal scorn, and indignation, and to the most cruel persecution.

The simplicity of their narrative constitutes a strong presumption in favour of their integrity. Men who have a story to relate, which contains many unusual and improbable circumstances, are generally
ready with their apologies, or vehement in their professions of veracity. Not so the historians of the life of Christ. They relate a series of the most extraordinary events which ever came to pass in the world, one after another, without interrupting the narrative by a single comment or exclamation. They tell their amazing tale with the same calmness of temper, with the same unaffected simplicity of style, with which they would relate incidents of every day's occurrence. A plain proof of their consciousness that they were relating facts of public notoriety, which no one could dispute.  

15 "Do the historians of our lord," says Dr. Campbell, (Dissertation on Miracles, part ii. sect. 1.) "deliver their testimony with doubt and hesitation? do they fall into the opposite extreme of using too violent asseverations? So far from both, that the most amazing instances of divine power, and the most interesting events, are related without any censure or reflection of the writers, on persons, parties, actions, or opinions; with such an unparalleled and unaffected simplicity, as demonstrates that they were neither themselves animated by passion, like enthusiasts, not had any design of working on the passions of their readers. The greatest miracles are recorded with as little appearance of doubt or wonder in the writer, and with as little suspicion of the reader's incredulity, as the most ordinary
The candour with which they relate facts, apparently to the disparagement of their master, of their friends, of themselves, or of their cause, is a satisfactory proof that truth was their sole object, and that they could have no intention to deceive their readers. That Jesus was a carpenter's son, that he came from Nazareth, that his townsmen, and even his brethren, hesitated to acknowledge his mission, and the like, might be regarded as objections to his high pretensions. The incredulity of the apostles, their stupidity in misunderstanding the plainest language, their absurd expectations of temporal grandeur, their silly disputes for secular pre-eminence, Peter's denial of his master with oaths and execrations, the treachery of Judas, the base desertion of all, the dissimulation of Peter at Antioch, the incidents. A manner as unlike that of impostors as of enthusiasts: a manner in which those writers are altogether singular; and I will add, a manner which can on no supposition be tolerably accounted for, but that of the truth, and not of the truth only, but of the notoriety, of the events which they related."
cowardice of Mark, the contention of Paul and Barnabas, the opposition made to the apostles by pharisaic bigots, the abuse of spiritual gifts, the disorderly and immoral conduct of the Corinthians and others, which might suggest, and which have indeed furnished to unbelievers, some of the most plausible objections to the christian religion—are presumptive arguments in favour of the credibility of the history; and the mention of such particulars as these, is a plain proof that the apostles and evangelists did not write as advocates for a party, but as lovers of truth 16.

The tendency of their writings to pro-

16 Paley's View, part ii. chap. 3. "It does not appear," says Dr. Duchal (as cited by Dr. Paley), "that ever it came into the mind of these writers, to consider how this or the other action would appear to mankind, or what objections might be raised on them. But, without at all attending to this, they lay the facts before you, at no pains to think whether they would appear credible or not. If the reader will not believe their testimony, there is no help for it: they tell the truth, and attend to nothing else. Surely this looks like sincerity, and that they published nothing to the world but what they believed themselves."

Duchal on Presumptive Evidences, p. 97, 98.
more, in an eminent degree, the love of truth, the practice of virtue, benevolence to man, and devotedness to God; clearly proves that they were not impostors. Is it possible that they should have represented it as the first duty of a Christian, the primary and inviolable law of his profession, to hazard all, and even to forsake all, in the cause of truth, if they were at the same time conscious that they were guilty of an impious and pernicious fraud 17?

The particularity of the evangelical history, the innumerable allusions to times, places, persons, and things, to the civil affairs of the Jews at that period, to their customs, prejudices, views, and expectations, to their religious sects, to the customs and manners of other countries, and particularly of the Greeks and Romans, all which circumstances agree minutely with the best accounts which are transmitted to us of those times and nations.

17. Paley's View, chap. ii. Simpson's Internal Evidences, part iii. chap. 18.
and many of which, though very naturally mentioned by a contemporary writer, would never have occurred to a forger of history, greatly corroborate the evidence of the evangelical narrative.

Further, the agreement of the historians with each other in all material facts, and their variation from, and inconsistency with each other, in minute circumstances, prove both that they are independent witnesses of the facts which they relate, and that their testimony is in the main highly credible; indeed much more credible than if they had agreed in every minute particular: for in this case they would have been open to a strong suspicion of collusion.

---


19 Dr. Priestley’s Institutes, part ii. chap. ii. sect. 4. Paley’s View, part iii. chap. 1. “The usual character of human testimony,” says this excellent writer, “is substantial truth under circumstantial variety. This is what the daily experience of courts of justice teaches. On the contrary, a close and minute agreement induces the suspicion of confederacy and fraud.”
Finally, if the facts which they relate had not been true, they might easily have been disproved, and could not possibly have gained any considerable or permanent credit.

These considerations are sufficient to prove, that the writers of the books of the New Testament were not deceivers: hence it follows, that their testimony must be true, and that the Christian religion is of divine original.

There are, however, two facts of peculiar importance, upon the truth of which the whole frame of Christianity rests, and the direct historical evidence of which it may be proper to consider with particular attention. These are, the resurrection of Christ, and the gift of the holy spirit.

The resurrection of Christ is a fact, the truth of which was uniformly asserted by the apostles and primitive believers.²⁰

²⁰ Upon this subject see West's Observations on the Resur-
It was attested by twelve persons chosen for this express purpose; who were competent to judge of a plain matter of fact, and who could not in this case be deceived. They knew Jesus perfectly. They had been his companions through the whole of his ministry. He was their master, their instructor, and their friend, with whom they had associated and conversed upon terms of the greatest intimacy. They were witnesses to his being put to death publicly, by his enemies; and they saw him expire on the cross, and deposited in the sepulchre. He appeared to them after his resurrection: they viewed him; they conversed with him; they handled him; they ate and drank with him at different times for the space of forty days; and though they were at first reluctant to believe, the proofs which he exhibited of his resurrection were so convincing as to overpower the most obstinate scepticism. They saw him ascend.

reception of Christ; Dr. Chandler's Sermons, vol. i. serm. 8, 9.; Dr. Priestley's Sermons on the Evidences of Revelation, vol. i. disc. 11.
to heaven. He afterwards appeared personally to Paul in his way to Damascus, and probably upon many other occasions 21.

The apostles were not deceivers. Their character places them above suspicion. They had no motive to deceive. The testimony they gave exposed them to scorn, to reproach, to persecution, and to death.

21 "It is not," says Dr. Paley, (vol. ii. p. 201) "that, as a miracle, the resurrection ought to be accounted a more decisive proof of supernatural agency than other miracles are; it is not that, as it stands in the gospel, it is better attested than some others; it is not for either of these reasons, that more weight belongs to it than to other miracles, but for the following: viz. That it is completely certain, that the apostles of Christ, and the first teachers of Christianity, asserted the fact. And this would have been certain if the four gospels had been lost, or never written. Every piece of scripture recognises the resurrection. Every epistle of every apostle, every author contemporary with the apostles, of the age immediately succeeding the apostles, every writing from that age to the present, genuine or spurious, on the side of Christianity or against it, concur in representing the resurrection of Christ as an article of his history, received without doubt or disagreement by all who called themselves Christians, as alleged from the beginning by the propagators of the institution, and alleged as the centre of their testimony. Nothing, I apprehend, which a man does not himself see or hear, can be more certain to him than this point."
in its most dreadful forms. The great design of their mission and ministry was to promote truth, and piety, and universal goodness; they could not therefore have combined together in the promulgation of a lie.

It may still be urged, that the resurrection of Jesus was a *private* miracle; and that the testimony of twelve men, however competent or upright, to a fact so extraordinary, would excite little attention, would gain little credit, and produce little effect.

To obviate this inconvenience, the testimony of the apostles was confirmed by the gift of the *holy spirit*, which was conferred upon them publicly upon the day of Pentecost; after which they travelled into different countries, and particularly through the several provinces of the Roman empire, preaching the gospel, working miracles, speaking divers languages, and communicating to the new converts miraculous powers; uniformly acknowledging
that they derived these powers from Christ, agreeably to the express promise he had made to them previously to his departure from them; and appealing to these powers as proper, complete, and absolute proofs of the mission and resurrection of Jesus.

In consequence of this testimony, delivered in circumstances so extraordinary and impressive, great multitudes, who had the best means of information, and the most urgent motives to inquiry, at the very time, in the very place, when and where these events are said to have happened, and where no conviction could possibly have been produced, had not the facts been of public notoriety, were firmly convinced of the reality of these facts; and in consequence of this conviction, they embraced, avowed, and promulgated a religion the most hostile to their inveterate prejudices, to their vicious inclinations, and to their secular interests; a religion, the public practical profession of which exposed them to reproaches the
most bitter, and to persecutions the most terrible. And in the promulgation of this novel, extraordinary, and offensive doctrine, they met with the most rapid and unparalleled success.

Finally, the testimony of the apostles remained wholly uncontradicted by those who were most inclined, and most interested to have refuted it, had it been in their power. The production of the body of Jesus would have detected the imposture in a moment, and would have silenced the apostles for ever. But this mode of confutation was never attempted.

It is hardly possible to conceive of evidence rising to a higher degree; and it may be fairly and justly maintained that the resurrection of Jesus is a fact supported by testimony beyond comparison superior to that of any other fact in history: that it would, literally speaking, be a miracle if such evidence should not be valid; it would be a phenomenon con-
trary to all the known laws of the human mind; and, considering the case in all its circumstances and bearings, the direct evidence of this important fact is abundantly competent to counterbalance and overrule any supposed antecedent improbability, which might be alleged from the nature of the event itself, considered as miraculous, and contrary to the established order of things.

It has, indeed, been asked, and it is a fair and reasonable question,—Why did Jesus, after his resurrection, appear only to his apostles and to a few of his own disciples and friends? Why did he not show himself in public? Why did he not visit the temple, and exhibit himself in the streets of Jerusalem to the people—to his enemies and persecutors—to the chief priests and rulers, and thus afford the most easy and the most indubitable proof of his being raised to life 22?

22 See upon this subject Dr. Priestley’s Discourses on Revelation, vol. i. p. 322, &c. Dr. Chandler’s Sermons, vol. i.
To this plausible, and often repeated objection, I reply in the first place, that even admitting that the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus would have been considerably strengthened by his public appearance, so as to have rendered it absolutely irresistible, it may be justly asked, what right have we to demand—what analogy would lead us to expect this decisive and over-powering evidence? The evidence actually granted is amply satisfactory to a reasonable and candid inquirer; nor is it analogous to the usual conduct of the divine government, to afford so high a degree of evidence upon moral subjects even of the greatest importance, such as his own existence, and attributes, and government, as would supersede inquiry, and preclude doubt.

But I am convinced that in the present instance we have no occasion to resort to this reply: for it is highly probable, that

serm. 10. an acute and argumentative discourse, in which every possible hypothesis which the objection will admit is stated and examined. Paley's View, part ii. ch. 8.
the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus would have been *considerably diminished* by his public appearance at Jerusalem or in the temple. In this case the rulers and people would either have believed, and been converted to Christianity, or they would not. If they had *denied* or explained away the fact, and rejected the mission, a supposition by no means improbable, considering the conduct of some at the resurrection of Lazarus, it would have been said in succeeding times, that contemporaries did not believe, that pretended eye-witnesses denied the fact, and rejected the doctrine. How then can you expect that we who live at this distance of place and time—that we who have no opportunity for examination and inquiry, should give credit to the tale? To this question, what reply could be made? But if, on the contrary, the Jews had *believed* the resurrection of Jesus; and if upon this ground they had *acknowledged* him as the Messiah, the religion of Jesus would from its commencement have been the re-

---

23 John, xi. 46.; xii. 9, 10.
ligion of the state: and how natural would it have been, in this case, for unbelievers to pretend, that the whole business was an artifice of the priests and rulers to impose upon the people! At least, we are sure that in these circumstances, the christian religion would have been entirely destitute of that convincing evidence, which it now derives from the rapid progress which it made in the world, not only without political support, but in direct opposition to the vices and prejudices of mankind, and to the interest and influence of the ecclesiastical and the civil authorities.

That the apostles were endowed with spiritual gifts, and miraculous powers, which they exerted upon various occasions, and which, in a limited degree, they were enabled to communicate to the primitive converts, is a fact of the utmost importance to the evidence of the christian revelation: it is in truth the public divine attestation to the resurrection of Christ; a fact which, however important

24 "Though Jesus did not appear in public after his resurrec-
in itself, and how well soever authenticated, was necessarily in a considerable degree a private miracle; and would perhaps never have excited sufficient attention, had it not been forced into public notice by the splendid miracles of the authorized witnesses of it. The evidence, therefore, of the actual existence of these miraculous powers ought to be distinctly stated.\(^{25}\)

In the first place we appeal to the testimony of Luke, in his history of the transactions of the apostles. He has there given in detail a narrative of the first descent of the holy spirit on the day of Pentecost; of the nature, purpose, and use of these miraculous powers; of the great

impression which they made upon those who were eye-witnesses to these extraordinary events, and of the wonderful effect produced by them in the conversion of multitudes to the Christian faith. This evangelist was a contemporary and associate with the apostles; his character is unimpeached; he deserves therefore to be admitted, both as a competent and a credible witness.

The truth of this account may also be inferred from the rapid and extensive progress of the Christian religion in the world: a fact, which though undeniable, can never be satisfactorily accounted for upon any other supposition.

But, the principal and most direct evidence of this important fact, is that which is derived from the epistles of Paul, and particularly, from those to the Corinthians and the Galatians; the genuineness of which has never been disputed, either in ancient or modern times. In both these churches, which the apostle had himself
planted, a powerful party had been formed against him, by some artful and eloquent rival, who had succeeded but too well in alienating the minds of a considerable number of the new converts from the person, and the doctrine of the apostle. Now, what method does the apostle take to reinstate himself in their esteem, and to recover them to the acknowledgement of truth and the practice of duty? He appeals to the miracles which he performed when he first preached the gospel among them. He appeals to the miraculous powers, which he, and he alone had imparted to them: powers which they at that very time actually possessed, which they freely exercised, which they shamefully perverted. He reproves them with due severity for the ostentatious display of their respective gifts, and for the neglect of those which were most useful. He gives much salutary advice, and suggests many wise and specific rules, for the proper application of the powers which they possessed. He warns offenders, and particularly the false teach-
ers, and corrupters of the faith, of the punishment, which, by the powers intrusted to him, he will inflict upon them, if they do not reform. Was this apostle insane? Read his epistles. Mark the strength and pertinence of his reasoning: the wisdom of his advice: the accuracy of his discrimination: the delicacy of his sentiments: the point of his sarcasm. What better proof can be adduced of the soundness of a writer's understanding, and of the calmness of his mind? But if the apostle was in possession of his intellects, the facts to which he bears this unequivocal testimony must be true. There is no other alternative. He must have possessed, and communicated the powers, which he challenges, and describes. It may be added in corroboration of the evidence, that the apostle wrote a second letter to the Corinthians about a year after the first: and, that it appears from this epistle, that the Corinthian believers had paid that attention to his former letter, which it is impossible they should have done, if it had
been filled with the ravings of lunacy, instead of containing grave, and indisputable facts²⁵.

Direct evidence, stronger, or more satisfactory than this, can hardly be conceived: and when combined with the acknowledged effect in the early and extensive progress of the christian religion, it is surely not too much to add, that, that understanding must be strangely inaccessible to argument, or that scepticism must be deeply rooted, and fondly cherished, upon which such considerations can make no impression.

²⁵ "If the Corinthians had really no such preternatural gifts, and if St. Paul had never wrought any miracles among them, it is impossible to think they would have retained any regard to him and to his doctrine. If we think so, we must suppose them to have been persons who lived in a polite country, and who had not the sense of savages: men, who had nothing of men besides the outward shape and resemblance: men of a different kind from any that the world ever saw before or since: for the most enthusiastic sect would forsake their founder and teacher, if he should write them long and grave epistles, full of matters of fact, which they all knew to be false, appealing to miracles which he had never wrought, and directing them to a discreet use of powers which themselves never had." Jortin's Discourses on the Christian Religion.—Works, vol. i. p. 58.
I will take leave to add, that we here learn the principal use of the invaluable epistles of Paul. They contain the most satisfactory evidence of the divine original of the christian religion: and therefore, they do not merit that neglect, and contempt, with which they are sometimes treated, even by those who ought to be better informed.  

Miraculous powers would cease, of course, with the apostolic age: for, it does

---

*56 We may here remark the wisdom of divine providence, in permitting those fierce contentions and gross abuses to spring up in the primitive apostolic church, which are often the wonder of believers, and the scoff of sceptics. Had it not been for the opposition, which was frequently made to the doctrine and authority of the apostle Paul, and the perversion of miraculous gifts in the Corinthian church, which compelled the apostle so often to appeal to the miraculous powers which he possessed and conferred, and which called forth his severe animadversion upon the offending parties, and his prudent advice for the discreet use of the gifts he had imparted, we, in this distant age, should have been destitute of that which is now by far the strongest, not to say, the only direct and satisfactory evidence of the existence of these gifts and powers, and of the truth of the christian religion. So that those party-animosities and flagrant irregularities which were the disgrace, and threatened, to all appearance, the ruin of the primitive church, have
not appear that any persons but the apostles themselves had the power of communicating spiritual gifts, nor, is there any credible account of the continuance of these supernatural endowments after the ministry of the apostles was closed.

The notoriety of these miraculous gifts and powers, and the general diffusion of them in the primitive apostolic church, has given rise to a plausible objection which it is proper to state, and to answer. If miracles were so frequent, and various, so

eventually furnished to distant ages the best evidence of the divine origin of Christianity. Thus does divine providence bring good out of apparent evil. And there can be no doubt that controversies which still subsist, however they may occasionally be conducted with intemperate warmth in the parties concerned, have their proper use under the divine government, and will ultimately be made subservient to the interests of truth and virtue.

*7 See Dr. Middleton's Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers which are supposed to have subsisted in the Christian Church, and his Vindication in Reply to Dr. Dodwell and Dr. Church. This controversy seems to have set the question completely at rest. No intelligent and well-informed person now contends for the continuance of miraculous powers after the apostolic age.
public, and indisputable, as Christians aver them to have been, how came they to make so light and limited an impression? How was it possible for the spectators to resist the evidence of their senses? Let the supposition be made, of a similar occurrence in modern times; that a man publicly executed, and known to be dead, should after three days be restored to life, that the evidence of this fact should be clear and undeniable, that it should have happened in the midst of a crowded metropolis, that a doctrine novel, and obnoxious, taught by this extraordinary person, or by missionaries authorized by him, should be confirmed by a series of acknowledged miracles, performed in the presence of thousands of competent, and credible witnesses,—what prejudice could close its eyes against the light of truth? what power on earth would under such circumstances venture to oppose the messenger of Heaven?

In reply to this very specious, and plausible objection, it may be remarked, that, if the facts believed by Christians had not
been true, the success of the christian religion would have been absolutely impossible, for reasons which have been already assigned. With respect to the little impression made by miracles upon persons at a distance, and who were prejudiced against the christian doctrine, they might either think, that the subject was unworthy of attention, or that the facts were exaggerated, or, they might have recourse to magical, or to demoniacal agency, which was at that time the popular, not to say, the philosophical belief. With regard to immediate spectators, the difficulty of accounting for their neglect of incontestable miracles must be acknowledged as very considerable. Some of these, who could neither be reconciled to the doctrine of Christ, nor deny his miracles, would naturally ascribe the latter to a confederacy with demons, or to the power of magic. But the true solution of the question is to be found in the power of fixed principles, and inveterate prejudices, to repel, and to overrule the most palpable evidence, which is far greater than a person who has
not attended to the subject would conceive to be possible. In the doctrine of transubstantiation, and in the Athanasian hypothesis of the trinity, the influence of fixed principles triumphs over the evidence of sense, and of intuition: and in the slow progress of the Newtonian philosophy, when it was first published to the world, the prejudices, even of profound philosophers, over-ruled the deductions of mathematical demonstration. Such prejudices as these might be expected to resist the evidence even of undeniable miracles. For what is this, but an appeal to the testimony of the senses? This supposition cannot, indeed in the present age be brought to the test of experience, but the gospel history declares the fact, and, judging from analogy, it does not appear improbable.

Such then, upon the whole, is the direct historical evidence of the divine mission.

---

98 See Weston's Inquiry into the Rejection of Christian Miracles, and Jortin's First Discourse concerning the Christian Religion.
of Christ, and the truth of his doctrine. The books of the New Testament were written in the age to which they are assigned, and, probably, by the persons to whom they are ascribed. And the testimony of these writers is credible, for they could not be deceived: they were not deceivers; and consequently, their narrative must be true, and worthy of acceptance and belief. Jesus therefore is a teacher sent from God, to reveal the doctrine of eternal life; and of his mission and his doctrine he has afforded the most ample and satisfactory proof, by his resurrection from the dead.
DISCOURSE III.

PROPHETIC AND INTERNAL EVIDENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN REVELATION.

JOHN xx. 31.

But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, ye might have life through his name.

Such is the avowed design of the evangelical history; to teach, and to prove, that "Jesus is the Christ;" the Messiah predicted by the Jewish scriptures; the great teacher of truth and righteousness; the anointed king, who was to introduce and to establish a spiritual dominion, which should gradually extend through the whole world, and endure to the end of time. The title of "the Son of God" is annexed to his character as Messiah, by which is chiefly intended, that he was the first of the human race who was raised from the dead to an immortal life, and put into possession of that glorious inheritance.
which is the destined portion of all virtuous professors of the gospel, in their proper season, and with a view to which they are now called, the children of God, and coheirs with Christ. The history is written to establish the faith of those who read it, in the mission and the doctrine of Christ, "that believing, they may have life through his name;" or, in other words, that becoming his true disciples, they may be entitled to an interest in the promises of his gospel.

In the prosecution of the design which I have in view, to establish the faith of all, and especially of my younger hearers, in the truth of the Christian revelation, by exhibiting a concise summary of its evidence; having first stated the expediency and necessity of revelation in general, and the utility of miracles, as the only proper and absolute proofs of the mission and doctrine of a prophet; I arranged the evidence of the Christian revelation under

1 Rom. viii. 17.
five general heads: the philosophical, the historical, the prophetic, the internal, and the testimony borne to the christian revelation by the prophets of the Old Testament.

The philosophical and the historical arguments have been already considered, and I now proceed,

Thirdly, to state that evidence of the christian religion, which is derived from the prophecies that are contained in the Christian Scriptures.

To the validity of an argument from prophecy, three conditions are requisite. First, that there should be sufficient evidence that the prophecy was delivered previously to the event; secondly, that the circumstances predicted should be beyond the reach of human sagacity to foresee; and thirdly, that the prophecy should receive its complete and appropriate accomplishment in the event to which it is applied.
The Christian religion appeals to prophecy as a proper evidence of its divine authority. "Now I tell you before it comes to pass," saith our Lord, "that when it is come to pass ye may believe." "The testimony of Jesus," saith the writer of the Apocalypse, "is the spirit of prophecy."

The prophecies contained in the New Testament are, either, those which were delivered by Jesus himself, or, by his apostles and other authorized ministers.

The predictions of Christ relate either to himself, or to his apostles, or to the Jewish polity, or to the success of the gospel.

With regard to himself, he foretold the manner and circumstances of his death; and likewise of his resurrection and of his ascension to the Father. "The Son of Man," saith he, Luke xviii. 31, "shall be delivered unto the gentiles, and

1 John xiii. 19. 2 Rev. xix. 10.
shall be mocked, and shamefully entreated, and spitted on, and they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again."

With regard to the *apostles*, he foretold the mission of the holy spirit, John xiv. 16, 17, "I will pray to the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, even the spirit of truth:" Acts i. 4, 5, "Wait at Jerusalem for the promise of the Father, which ye have heard of me: for ye shall be baptized with the holy spirit not many days hence. And ye shall receive power when the holy spirit is come upon you, and shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth."

He also foretold the persecutions they

---

4 See also, Matt. xvi. 21.; xx. 18, 19.; xxvi. 23. 31. Mark x. 33, 34.; xiv. 30. John iii. 14, 15.; xii. 32, 33. He foretells his resurrection, Matt. xvi. 21.; xii. 40.; xxvi. 32.; xxvii. 63, 64. John ii. 13. 21. His ascension, John xx. 17.
should suffer, John xvi. 2, "The time cometh, that whosoever killeth you shall think that he doeth God service." He predicted the martyrdom of Peter, John xxvi. 18, "When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whithersoever thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hand, and another shall gird thee, and lead thee whither thou wouldest not." He also hints at the longevity of John, when in reply to Peter's question, ver. 22, "And what shall this man do?" he said, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?"

Concerning the Jewish nation, he foretold first, that the stately and magnificent temple of Jerusalem, would in a few years be rased to its foundation, so that one stone would not be left upon another; that the then existing generation would not perish till this prediction had received its accom-

6. See also, Matt. x. 16. 22.; xxiv. 9, 10.
plishment; and that some who then heard him, would be witnesses to the terrible catastrophe. Also, that Jerusalem would be besieged, captured, and laid waste by the gentiles, that the Jewish polity would be dissolved, and the Jewish people scattered through all nations. Further, that these calamitous events would be preceded by sanguinary wars, tumults, and massacres; by false prophets and false Messiahs, who would delude multitudes to their destruction; and by extraordinary and terrific appearances in the heavens; and finally, that the Jewish nation would be involved in unparalleled disasters, from which none would escape, but those, who, attending to the warning which he had given, should provide in time for their own safety. "When ye see," saith he, "Jerusalem encompassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof draweth nigh. Wrath shall be upon this people: they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down by the gen-
tiles. Verily, I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass away till all be fulfilled.” Luke xxi. 20—32.

With respect to the gospel, he foretold, what in itself was most improbable, its rapid progress through the world, its publication to all nations even previously to the invasion of Judea, and the destruction of Jerusalem, and its early triumphs over heathen idolatry. Luke x. 18, “I saw Satan, like lightning, fall from heaven;” that is, in prophetic vision, I saw the anti-christian and idolatrous power everywhere overthrown by the irresistible spirit and energy of the gospel. And in Matt. xxiv. 14, he declares, in still plainer language, that “the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness to all nations, and then shall the end come.”

7 See also, Matt. xxiv.; Mark xiii.
8 “As lightning, swiftly and precipitately. The meaning is, I see, and have seen some time since, the kingdom of Satan rapidly diminishing.” Archbishop Newcome. Nothing can be more trifling or irrelevant than the common interpretation of this passage, as referring to a real person and a local descent.
9 See also, Matt. xiii. 31. 33.; xvi. 16 John xv. 6.
That the circumstances thus foretold were such as human sagacity could not have foreseen, few persons will dispute. That they were amply accomplished in their respective appropriate events, the history of those times affords the most satisfactory proof:—faithful impartial history, not penned by persons who had read or even heard of the prophecy, and who assuredly had no intention to confirm or to promote the christian religion. The only circumstance liable to question is, whether the prophecies themselves were forged. And they who after a careful perusal of the writings of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, can seriously believe that such writers were capable of so base and impious a forgery, will consequently give up this argument from prophecy: but they who regard the evangelists as honest and well-informed historians, cannot but acknowledge, that the person who delivered these extraordinary predictions must have

10 Particularly Josephus, in his History of the Wars of the Jews. Also Tacitus and Pliny, in the passages before referred to. See Bp. Newton on Prophecy; Diss. xviii. xxi.
been a prophet, and a messenger of God.

The second class of prophecies contained in the New Testament, are those of the Apostles, and particularly of Paul and John.

The apostle Paul, in the second epistle to the Thessalonians, foretells the existence of an antichristian power, which he calls the man of sin, and the son of perdition, which, sitting in the temple of God, would exalt itself above every thing which is called divine or august, whose appearance would resemble that of Satan, or the idolatrous power, in all false miracles, and signs, and wonders, but whom the Lord Jesus would ultimately destroy with the breath of his mouth, and the brightness of his appearance. And, in the first epistle to Timothy, he foretells that some would apostatize from the faith, giving heed to deceitful spirits, and to doctrines concerning demons, forbidding to marry, and requiring unnecessary
abstinence from different kinds of food, all of which, if wholesome, are under the christian dispensation, at all times, equally lawful. These prophecies are by some expositors applied and limited to the corruptions of papal Rome; by others, they are, perhaps with greater propriety, extended to all the evils which have accrued from the civil establishment of a corrupt christianity, of which the church of Rome is only a part, though undoubtedly a principal and most conspicuous branch. And so far as the events to which the prophecies are applied, and by which they are interpreted, appear to the serious and candid inquirer to correspond with the prophecy, this perceived agreement must carry with it a correspondent conviction, that the apostle wrote under an immediate divine impulse, and, consequently, that the christian doctrine, of which he was the authorized missionary, is of divine original.

11 See upon this subject Dr. Benson's excellent Dissertation upon the Man of Sin, annexed to his Paraphrase upon the
The Apocalypse, or the book of Revelation, generally attributed to the apostle John, though doubted by many, and discarded by some, is nevertheless regarded by a very considerable proportion of learned, inquisitive, and judicious christians, as a genuine work, and an authentic and most important prophecy. And, though many readers treat this book with much disrespect, and some are disposed to throw out severe and unbecoming sarcasms upon those who hold it in veneration, and who endeavour to investigate and to explain its contents, nevertheless the apocalypse has in general, though not without some eminent exceptions, been valued most by those who have examined it with the greatest care, and who therefore ought to be most competent to judge in the case. The great names of Joseph Mede, and of Sir Isaac Newton, of Lowman and Lardner, of Priestley and Evanson, are surely sufficient to screen the character of this

Second Epistle to the Thessalonians. Also Bishop Newton on Prophecy, Diss. xxii. xxiii.
ancient and mysterious volume from the rude and malignant censures of those who have not paid attention to the subject. To many, who upon attentive consideration admit the divine authority of the apocalyptic vision, it appears to contain an astonishing prediction of a continued series of events, relating to the state and character of the Christian church, from the first promulgation of the Christian religion to the grand consummation of all things; and as constituting altogether the clearest, the most unexceptionable, and the most decisive evidence of the truth and divine authority of the Christian revelation.

Fourthly. We now proceed to inquire into the internal evidences of the Christian revelation.

Internal evidence arises from the consideration of the contents of the books of the New Testament, unconnected with external testimony. Out of many, I shall select and state a few articles, which
appear to be of primary importance; and the serious consideration of which cannot fail to carry conviction to a candid and inquisitive mind.

1. The first relates to the **character of Christ.**

The character of Jesus is perfectly original. It is unlike every thing which had ever appeared in the world. There had indeed been eminent persons who had assumed the office of instructors of mankind in religion and virtue. But Jesus differed widely from them all, in the nature of his doctrine, in his mode of instruction, in his habits of life, and manner of conversation, in the character which he assumed, in the dignity of his conduct, in the authority of his language\(^{12}\), in the

---

\(^{12}\) The conscious dignity of our Lord's manner, and the plenty authority of his language, so uniformly supported, without any appearance of affectation, through the whole evangelical history, must make a deep impression upon the mind of every intelligent and attentive reader. Thus, in his discourse from the mount, Matt. v., he repeatedly represents
proofs which he exhibited of a divine commission, and in the manner in which he left those proofs to make their proper impression upon the mind, without directly pointing out the genuine conclusions.

himself as fully authorized to make alterations in the written law. This circumstance seems to have struck his hearers more forcibly than any other. "The multitude," says the evangelist, "were astonished at his doctrine, for he taught them as one having authority." vii. 29. And the excuse which the officers allege for not apprehending Jesus is, "Never man spake like this man." John vii. 46. The dignity with which his stupendous miracles were performed is equally conspicuous and admirable. To Lazarus, when he was about to raise him from the grave, he calls with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." John xi. 43. And to the wind and sea, he saith, "Peace, be still." He uses similar language in healing the demoniacs, in conformity to the rude philosophy of the age. Luke iv. 35. Upon these occasions, likewise, the multitude naturally express their astonishment. "What word is this? for with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out." v. 37. And again, "What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" Mark iv. 41. This calm assumption of authority, which never fails in a single instance, through the whole course of the narrative, is wonderfully congruous to the character of one who was conscious that the spirit was imparted to him without measure. But would the illiterate evangelists have attended so nicely and invariably to this important but not very obvious trait of character, if they had not delineated the portrait from real life?
He claimed to be the Messiah, the distinguished personage foretold by the prophets, and expected by the Jews. But the form which he assumed was totally different from that in which he was expected to appear; from that which an impostor would have worn, which all impostors did actually put on, and which the writer of a fictitious narrative would naturally have represented. He was expected to appear in all the splendour of a prince and a conqueror. He actually appeared under the form of a pauper and a servant.\(^\text{13}\)

The character which he thus assumed, so entirely new, so utterly unexpected, and in many respects so very offensive to his countrymen, he sustained with the most consummate propriety. The circumstances in which he was placed were numerous, various, and dissimilar to each other:—some of them were very critical,

\(^{13}\text{See Paley's View of the Evidences of Christianity, vol. ii. part. 2. c. 5.}\)
and difficult; nevertheless, upon all occasions he maintains the character of a prophet of God, of a teacher of truth and righteousness, with the most perfect consistency and dignity: in no instance does he forget his situation: upon no occasion, in no emergency, however sudden or unexpected, under no provocation, however irritating, is he surprised or betrayed to say or to do any thing unworthy of himself, or unbecoming the sublime and sacred mission with which he was charged.

To support the consistency of a fictitious character through a considerable work, even though the character is drawn from common life, is a mark of no ordinary capacity and judgment. But to adhere from beginning to end to truth of delineation in a character perfectly original, in circumstances various and new, and especially where supernatural agency is introduced, is characteristic of genius of the highest order. Attempts to represent a perfect character have failed in the hands of the greatest masters. Defects
are visible in the portraits of the philosopher and of the hero, notwithstanding the masterly pencilling, and the exquisite colouring, of Plato and Xenophon. But the obscure and illiterate evangelists have succeeded to perfection. Not one writer only, but four. Not in describing different characters, in which they would not have been liable to have interfered with each other, but in the representation of the same unblemished and extraordinary character; to which each has contributed something which the rest have omitted, and yet all are perfectly consistent and harmonious,—the unity of character is invariably preserved.

Admit that this character actually existed, allow that there was such a person as Jesus of Nazareth, and, that the historians describe nothing but what they saw and heard, and to which they were daily witnesses, and the wonder ceases; all is natural and easy: the narrators were honest and competent witnesses; and Jesus was a true prophet of the Most High.
Deny these facts, and the history of the evangelists instantly swells into a prodigy of genius; a sublime fiction of the imagination, which surpasses all the most celebrated productions of human wit. The illiterate Galileans eclipse all the renowned historians, philosophers, and poets of Greece and Rome. But, who will affirm, or who could believe this, of these simple, artless, unaffected writers? It is incredible, it is impossible, that these plain and unlettered men should have invented so extraordinary, so highly finished a romance. Their narrative therefore must be true. The prophet of Nazareth is a real person, and his divine legation is undeniable. I know not how this argument may appear to others; but to me it carries the force, almost, of mathematical demonstration. I cannot conceive of a proof which can be more satisfactory to a candid, an intelligent, and a well-informed mind.

2. The history of the miracles of Christ contains strong presumptive evidence of authenticity and truth.
The prodigies related by heathen historians of the best credit are, in general, either absurdities, or nothing more than unusual natural appearances: they are often reported with marks of doubt by the historians themselves, and they not unfrequently carry their own confutation with them. As to the miracles of popery, they are seldom any thing more than jugglers' tricks, and are never performed where they are most wanted, for the conversion of unbelievers. But the facts described in the gospels as miraculous are real miracles. Nothing is related by these untutored, unphilosophical historians as a deviation from the usual course of nature, but what would universally be admitted as such even in the present enlightened and philosophic age.

Also, the miracles which they ascribe to Jesus are perfectly in character. None are trifling and puerile. All were instructive and useful: and by far the greater number were evidently benevolent, and in every view worthy of the messenger of
peace and good-will to men. And if there be one or two which appear to wear a different aspect, and are liable to some plausible objection, these difficulties admit of solutions which, by a candid inquirer, will generally be deemed satisfactory. This argument may be illustrated by a reference to the Life of Apollonius Tyansæus, a heathen philosopher and teacher, and a pretender to the power of working miracles. His history was written at the desire of the empress Julia, the wife of Severus, in the beginning of the third century, by one of the philosophers of her court, for the express purpose of discrediting the miracles of Christ. And among other silly and frivolous tales, it is related, that this extraordinary man understood the language, and would interpret the conversation of birds. Had anything of this kind appeared in the christian scriptures, it would have been an objection to the credit of the history, which would indeed have been very difficult to repel. And that the rude mechanics of Galilee did not fall into similar and equal
absurdities with the learned philosopher of the imperial court, can only be explained upon the supposition, that he wrote from invention, and they from fact\textsuperscript{14}.

3. The nature and limitation of the christian doctrine, and its wise and accurate adjustment to the circumstances and wants of mankind, are a strong internal proof of its divine original.

The light of nature can afford very little satisfaction in the investigation of the interesting problem concerning a future life. The capacity of looking forward into futurity, and of governing the conduct by the hopes and fears of a life to come, the moral constitution of human nature, and the origin and progress of the disinterested, benevolent, and theopathic affections, the improbability that the busy anxious scene of life would terminate in

suffering which can be of no use, and the prospect of which chills the spirit, and embitters the joys of life, the outlines of a just, but unfinished, moral government, and the confused, but general, traditional expectation of a future life,—these considerations combined, might possibly excite in a contemplative mind, a dawning hope that such a state might perhaps be in reserve, at least for the virtuous and the wise. But when, upon further inquiry, it would appear evident that reason and philosophy encourage no hope of a future life, but by a resurrection from the grave,—that all expectation of the separate existence, and activity of the soul, while the body is entombed, is unfounded in experience, and contradicted by every phenomenon of the human mind, and is therefore imaginary and vain,—and that the history of human nature supplies no analogy which would warrant the expectation of a resurrection of the dead,—what conclusion could possibly result from such a speculation but—That though all things are possible with God, and
though to the virtuous; a future existence would be a most desirable event; and though some appearances both of the intellectual and the moral world, would be solved most easily, and most satisfactorily, upon this pleasing supposition, yet, upon the whole, that the evidence appears to preponderate upon the dark and gloomy side, and naturally leads to the sad conclusion, that, in the final result of things, the rational human being has no pre-eminence over the brute, nor the wise man over the fool, but that all are equally destined to return in a short time to the dust from whence they were taken, and to make their perpetual abode in the land of silence, of darkness, and oblivion.

Now, that the christian doctrine should take us up, just where the light of nature fails, where reason can furnish no argument, and experience supply no analogy, upon which to build the expectation of futurity, that the gospel should reveal what is amply sufficient to excite our hopes, to alarm our fears, and to govern
our practice, but not enough to gratify the insatiable appetite of human curiosity, or to amuse the fancy with useless speculations, that it should teach, in terms that could not be misunderstood, the awful doctrine of a life to come, in which all shall be rewarded according to their works, that it should represent the future existence of man as founded upon a resurrection of the dead; a notion, which, though it is now proved to be the only one consistent with the true philosophy of nature and of man, was at that time held by few, and rejected by the philosophers with indignation and contempt; that this doctrine should be established, not only by miracles in general, but by that specific miracle, the resurrection of the founder of the Christian faith, after a public crucifixion by his enemies, an evidence calculated beyond all others to obviate the objections of reason, and the appearances of nature, by exhibiting in the person of the great teacher of this momentous truth, a pattern, and a pledge of the accomplishment of the promise; that all these cir-
cumstances should concur in the christian doctrine, surely indicates greater sagacity of mind, greater compass of thought, and depth of research, than can justly be attributed to the simple, unlearned historians of Jesus. This wonderful harmony of the divine dispensations, this nice adjustment of the supply to the deficiency, this exact economy of supernatural communication, which imparts all that is necessary, without superfluity or excess, can be ascribed to no wisdom less than divine. That Being alone, who was the creator of man, and who was intimately acquainted with all the circumstances, and all the wants of his intelligent offspring, could have supplied them with information so accurately adapted to the circumstances of the case. It can hardly be believed by any considerate person, that if the christian religion had been a human invention, it should have been conducted with such consummate propriety, that nothing necessary should have been omitted, that nothing unworthy of the teacher, or of the subject, should have been introduced. And this argument will appear
more forcible, if we consider into what chimerical details impostors have always entered, of a future state of existence, and into what groundless, and injudicious speculations, christians themselves have often launched, when they have presumed to be wise above what is written, and to add their own inventions to the oracles of truth.

4. The purity, sublimity, and perfection of the christian morality is another cogent internal evidence of the divine origin and authority of the christian revelation.

That in a code of moral principles and precepts drawn up by men of mean extraction, of confined education, and of mechanical occupation, no error should be committed, that all should be intelligible, correct, consistent, and complete; that no genuine virtue should be omitted; that no false principle, no immoral maxim, how common or fashionable soever, should be allowed; that such virtues as humility, meekness, forbearance, forgiveness, love
to enemies, returning good for evil, should be insisted upon as duties of primary importance, though 'branded with contempt by the proud philosophy of the age; that what was called patriotism, the exclusive love of one's country, the principle which sacrifices the general interest of mankind to that of the particular community of which a person happens to be a member, that this dazzling quality, the boast of antiquity, the pride of heroes and philosophers, should find no place in the catalogue of Christian virtues, that it should not be once mentioned in the Christian directory, that it should be wholly lost and absorbed in the far more comprehensive principle of universal philanthropy and good-will, in that rational and generous affection which binds man to man, in the indissoluble bonds of fraternal love, which places the duty and the happiness of all, in doing good to all, as opportunity occurs, which excludes none from offices of kindness, but extends relief with equal readiness to the Samaritan as to the Jew, to the African as to the European, to the enemy as to
the friend: that in this beautiful and consistent system of morals, those vices should be condemned by name, and without exception, which were tolerated, approved, and sometimes even enjoined, by heathen superstition and ignorance, while at the same time no virtue is carried to excess, no stress is laid upon one, to the exclusion of others; that neither prayer, nor almsgiving, nor fasting, nor mortification and penance, nor sabbatizing, nor any external rite whatever, are substituted in the place of moral virtues, nor any one virtue of whatever rank or value, is permitted to supersede another, but every virtue finds its proper place, and is arranged in its proper order and connection: that the foundation of all should be laid in the love of God and our neighbour, and that the perfection of the superstructure should be such as the wisdom of man, instructed by the experience of ages, has never been able to improve, and never will: that a system so just, so liberal, so comprehensive and complete, should have been invented and published by a combination of the
efforts and researches of the wisest and best men in any age and country, would have been the subject of just admiration; but that it should have been introduced, and taught, and inculcated, without any ostentation or parade, by a small number of unlearned men, who had been educated in all the narrow bigotry, and malignant prejudices of Pharisaic Jews, is surely to the last degree incredible, not to say absolutely impossible, if the supposition of divine instruction, and supernatural illumination, should be denied.

5. The professed design of the christian religion, as avowed by its first teachers, was no less than to supersede the Jewish economy, to overthrow all the long-established and highly venerated systems of superstition and idolatry, which prevailed in the heathen world, to convert all the nations to the faith of the gospel, and to establish in every place the knowledge and worship of the One true and living God, and the practice of universal
virtue. This was the commission given by Jesus himself to his apostles immediately before his ascension. "Go forth to all nations, and preach the gospel to every creature." This was the professed object of the apostle Paul, that eminent missionary of evangelical truth. "I am debtor," says he, "to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians, to the wise, and to the unwise. The times of ignorance God winked at, but now he commandeth all men, every where, to repent." And the christian prophets express upon all occasions the most unhesitating confidence in the ultimate success of their mission. "The little leaven will gradually diffuse itself through the whole mass." "The fullness of the gentiles shall be brought in, and all Israel shall be saved." And in the apocalyptic vision, when the seventh angel had sounded his trumpet, great voices were heard in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms

---

of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever." And the apostle Peter declares 19, that according to the divine promise "we look for a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness:" that is, according to the most rational interpretation of the passage, we expect a complete and happy renovation of the moral world, by the diffusion of the gospel.

A design so magnificent and stupendous as this was not likely to have entered into the thoughts of the low mechanics of Galilee, and much less to have been undertaken and achieved by them, had they not been conscious that they were inspired from Heaven, that they acted under an authority which no human potentate could control, and were supported by an energy which no opposition could defeat.

6. The tendency of the Christian Scriptures is to teach and to incul-
cate the fear and the love of God, and the practice of virtue in all its branches. The authors appear to have written their respective works under a deep impression of the infinite importance of revealed truth, and to have been penetrated with a lively concern for the improvement and happiness of their fellow-creatures, and both by precept and example they enforce a firm and fearless profession of moral and religious truth, at the hazard of every thing dear and valuable in life. Is it then in the nature of things conceivable that men whose views were so pure, and the tendency of whose writings was so excellent, should themselves have been guilty of the grossest violation of their own principles, and should have commenced their career with imposing upon the world an impious and a mischievous forgery in the name of the God of truth? It cannot be.

It often happens that frail man is inconsistent with himself: and sometimes men who would be thought wise, have adopted
unjustifiable means of promoting ends which they have conceived to be important. But a case parallel to the present, upon the supposition that the gospel is a forgery, never yet occurred in the annals of folly and of crime.—That men aiming to inculcate, in the most forcible manner, the practice of virtue and of good morals, and above all things enjoining a supreme regard to truth, and reverence for the Divine Being, should, in order to accomplish such a design, have entered upon their mission with a lie in their mouths, which could not fail to be immediately detected, and, when detected, totally to defeat their purpose, and to expose them to universal scorn!—No, no; the supposition is impossible. It is not in the nature of things that such men, embarked in such a cause, should ever have used such unjust and unwarrantable means to attain success. And therefore their testimony must be true.

Hence then we justly and triumphantly conclude, that the christian doctrine is of
divine original: and that an habitual and practical regard to it is the highest wisdom, and the indispensable duty of all to whom the joyful tidings are made known. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."
DISCOURSE IV.

EVIDENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN REVELATION
FROM THE TESTIMONY OF THE JEWISH
SCRIPTURES.

LUKE xxiv. 27.

AND BEGINNING AT MOSES AND ALL THE PROPHETS,
HE EXPOUNDED UNTO THEM IN ALL THE SCRIPTURES
THE THINGS CONCERNING HIMSELF.

It is a probable conjecture that one of
the disciples to whom this interesting dis-
course ¹ was addressed, was the evangelist

¹ The name of one of these was Cleopas, ver. 18. he was the
same with Alpheus, the father of James and Jude, two of the
apostles, and near relations to our Lord. Luke vi. 15, 16.
Matt. xxvii. 56. John xix. 25. The name of the other is
not mentioned, and the more general opinion is, that it was
the evangelist himself. Theophylact, and Nicephorus men-
tion this as an ancient tradition. Basnage, and Lardner
think it probable. See Theophylact. in loc. and Nicephor.
Eccl. Hist. l. i. c. 34. Lardner’s History of the Apostles
and Evangelists, vol. i. chap. viii. page 246. ed. 2. Dr. Light-
foot Hor. Heb. in Mark xvi. 13, and Luke xxiv. 34, conjec-
tures that this person was the apostle Peter; but Dr. Dod-
dridge, in a very judicious note on Mark xvi. 12, has shown
the extreme improbability of this supposition.
Luke himself: and if so, how much is it to be regretted, that he did not think fit to give it a place in his instructive and invaluable history! It cannot reasonably be doubted, that the prophecies relating to the Messiah were well understood, and correctly applied, by our great instructor, to whom the spirit was given without measure: and had this truly authentic exposition been still extant, it must have cast a very splendid light upon this branch of the evidences of the Christian religion. But the wisdom of Divine Providence has not seen fit to indulge us with this important information: and so far as the evidence of the divine authority of the Christian revelation rests upon the testimony of the Jewish Scriptures, we are left to collect it in the best manner we are able from those documents themselves.

This is the evidence which now remains to be stated and examined, after the summary view which we have already taken
of the philosophic, the historic, the prophetic, and the internal.

Minds differently constituted conceive differently of the same subject: and arguments which to one person appear clear, convincing, and irresistible, often make but little impression upon another. And herein appears the great wisdom and goodness of God, in supplying the christian revelation with a variety of evidence adapted to the various tastes and habits of thinking of the different classes of mankind: to all of whom the interesting and sublime discovery of a future life, is of equal and infinite importance.

I have no doubt that there are some persons to whom the evidence of the divine authority of the christian religion from the prophecies of the Old Testament, is in the highest degree satisfactory and convincing. With regard to myself, I must confess that it does not convey to my own mind that clear, and, I can almost say, unhesitating assurance which
I derive from an attention to the philosophic, the historic, or the internal evidence. Not that I think the prophetic evidence essentially defective. But, I find it difficult to satisfy myself that I fully comprehend the true meaning and intent of the prophetic language. Upon the whole, however, I regard the evidence from the Old Testament as very considerable, and as calculated to make a strong and favourable impression upon a candid, serious, and intelligent mind: and, in connection with the evidence already produced, it decisively establishes the truth and divine authority of the Christian religion. I now therefore proceed to exhibit that view of it, which to my own apprehension is most satisfactory, and least liable to objection and cavil. And, in order to this, it must be proved, First, that the Hebrew nation was favoured with a revelation from God, and Secondly, that the sacred books of the Jews contain a series of prophecies, which received their proper accomplishment in the person and character of Jesus of Nazareth.
First, The truth and divine authority of the christian religion, may be and have been proved, independently of the truth of the Jewish revelation. And I scruple not to allow that a man may be a sincere christian, a rational and firm believer in the divine mission of Christ, and a humble, virtuous expectant of immortality by him, who may at the same time hesitate to admit the divine legation of the Hebrew lawgiver. The law of Moses, as a system of positive institutions, and mental discipline, has answered its end. It is dead. It is abolished. The believer in Christ has no more to do with the institute of Moses as a rule of life, than with the precepts of Pythagoras or Confucius: or, to use the still more energetic illustration of the apostle, than a living man with a dead carcase. And a person.

---

1 See Romans vii. 1—6, and Dr. Taylor's Commentary upon the text.
2 Gal. ii. 19, 20. This also appears to be the best interpretation of Rom. vii. 24. The Jew under the law complains of the burthen of the law, as of a carcase attached to a living man; which impedes his operations, and fills him with misery,
who is convinced by historical, or by internal evidence, of the truth of the christian doctrine, and of the divine mission of its author, may without any impeachment of his faith in the gospel argue, that this persuasion is sufficient to govern his practice, and that he is not bound to examine into the authority of a revelation, which, if genuine, is allowed to be obsolete. There are some who are well satisfied of the truth of the christian doctrine, to whom the Jewish revelation appears encumbered with insurmountable difficulties. While others, discerning the inseparable connection between the dispensations of Moses and of Christ, and the frequent appeals made to the Hebrew prophets by Jesus and his apostles, assuming as a fact the falsehood of Judaism, have upon that ground concluded that the christian religion itself is not from God.

and despair. "The grace of God," v. 25, (see the Clérmont and Vulgate in Griesbach) that is, the gospel of Jesus sets him at liberty: he is no longer subject to condemnation, but is able to exert his faculties in the practice of virtue. See Locke and Taylor on the passage.
While, however, I can readily admit that a person who suspends his faith in the Jewish revelation may, notwithstanding, be a sincere, and in a practical view, an eminent christian, yet, I cannot allow that he is a well-informed believer, and I am persuaded, that further inquiry would convince him, that the Hebrew nation was actually favoured with a revelation from Heaven, and that the Hebrew prophets spake and wrote under an immediate divine suggestion.

But, in order to make way for the proof of this important fact, I would in the first place entirely set aside the popular notion of the plenary inspiration of all the books of the Old Testament, and of every thing contained in them; a supposition, than which nothing was ever more unfounded or extravagant, nothing more inconsistent with all sound criticism and rational interpretation: nothing was ever more replete with absurdity, or ever gave a fairer handle, a keener edge, or a more irresisti-
ble force, to the objections and to the sarcasms of infidelity.

I would also set aside, as having nothing to do with the present question, the consideration, whether the pentateuch throughout, or in part only, was written by Moses, or whether, as some learned men have contended, it was the compilation of a later writer 4.

Neither is it at all essential to the proof of the proposition in question, to suppose, or to maintain, that the pentateuch contains a perfectly correct and authentic narrative of facts, or of the subject, the mode, the language, or the occasion, of divine communications. It would be no objection to the general position, that the Hebrew nation was favoured with a revela-

---

4 Sir Isaac Newton and Lord Barrington conjecture that the pentateuch was compiled by Samuel. Barrington's Essay on Divine Dispensations, Appendix, No. iv. Dr. Geddes supposes these Books to have been written or collected in the reign of Solomon. Geddes's Translation, vol. i. preface, p. 18.
tion from Heaven, to admit, that the doctrines and laws which were originally delivered by God to Moses, are, in their present state, so mixed and blended with traditions and human inventions, that what is genuine in the records which are still extant, bears but a small proportion to what is spurious; and that it is, in many cases, beyond the reach of human sagacity to distinguish between them.

What I must assume as the basis of my argument, and what I presume will not be denied by any person of intelligence and information, is this, that the Jewish scriptures are now, with little or no variation, the same as they were at the close of the Babylonian captivity, five hundred years.

* Father Simon says that the Jews ascribe these errors to the loss of their copies at the time of the captivity in Babylon, and say that it is impossible that the collection of scripture should be perfect for want of true and faithful copies. Simon’s Critical History of the Old Testament, b. i. c. 5. p. 43. Some of the christian fathers had a tradition, borrowed from the Jews, that all the scriptures were lost and destroyed in the Babylonian captivity, and that Ezra restored them all again by divine revelation. Prideaux’s Connection, vol. i. b. v. p. 329.
before the birth of Christ. The Jewish writings which were then extant, were collected with care by Ezra, and other respectable and learned Jews in succession, who were called the men of the great synagogue, and who continued to make additions and corrections to the Jewish scriptures to the best of their judgment and ability, for upwards of a hundred and fifty years after the captivity, to the time of Alexander the Great, a little more than three hundred years before Christ. These writings so collected, and amended, continued without any material change to the time of Christ; being vigilantly guarded by the contending sects of the Jews, which rose and flourished during that period. These hostile sects being animated with the bitterest rancour against each other, and all professing to regard these writings as sacred, no sect could make any alteration in them in favour of its peculiar tenets, without being instantly detected and ex-

6 See Prideaux's Connection, part i. book v.
posed by all the rest. And, from the first promulgation of the Christian religion, to the present day, the Jews and Christians, bearing the same animosity to each other as the Pharisees and Sadducees, and both holding the scriptures of the Old Testament in the highest veneration, each party would maintain a jealous inspection over the other, and each would be eager to detect, and to expose, any material or wilful corruption of the text, which might be attempted by the other.

I must also assume, what I presume will not be denied, and what indeed has never been disputed by men of understanding, that the main facts of the Jewish history are true. That the Jews are descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: that they were once slaves in Egypt: that they were delivered from this bondage by Moses, who became their leader, and their lawgiver: that they established themselves in Canaan by right of conquest: that they were at first governed by judges,
and afterwards by kings: that Saul, of the tribe of Benjamin, was their first sovereign: that their next king was David, of the tribe of Judah, a great and successful warrior: that he was succeeded by his son Solomon, a wise and pacific prince, who built a splendid and magnificent temple at Jerusalem: that under the administration of his imprudent son and successor Rehoboam, the nation was divided into the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah: that the kingdom of Israel, consisting of ten tribes, after having been governed by Jeroboam and his successors upwards of two hundred and fifty years, was terminated by the Assyrian captivity, from which it never returned: that the kingdom of Judah and Benjamin, which adhered to the house of David, having subsisted upwards of a hundred years after the dissolution of the kingdom of Israel, was finally subdued by Nebuchadnezzar, who razed the city of Jerusalem, who demolished its celebrated temple, and carried the inhabitants of the country captives
into Babylon: that the captivity continued seventy years, after which, by the decree of Cyrus king of Persia, who had taken Babylon, and put an end to the Babylonian empire, the Jews were restored to their own country, and to their own laws; and were permitted to rebuild the city and the temple five hundred years before the birth of Christ.

1. Now that this extraordinary people was favoured with a divine revelation, and that their prophets spoke and taught under a divine commission, appears, in the first place, from the just and sublime notions which they entertained of the character and attributes of the supreme Being, and their confirmed belief in the great doctrine of the unity of God, amidst the superstition and idolatry of the surrounding nations, those especially, who in other respects were more civilized, and better informed.

What was the doctrine of Egypt, the parent of science and the arts; concerning
the attributes and providence of God? What were the notions of the Chaldeans, renowned for wisdom and philosophical research? What were the opinions held and taught by the polished Greeks, and the enlightened Romans? From their immortal poets we learn the system of popular belief, than which nothing can be more remote from truth, nothing more absurd, nothing more dishonourable to the divine perfections, nothing more pernicious to good morals. This mythology, this _elegant_ mythology, as it has been strangely called, consisted of a multitude of Gods of different orders and degrees, of characters the most profligate, the patrons of every vice, the instigators to every thing which can degrade and disgrace human nature, and reduce men to a level with the brutes. Nor were the speculations of the philosopher, gene-

---


Quis nescit ———— qualia demens

Ægyptus portenta colat?

Juvenal. Sat. xv.

8 Winder's History of Knowledge, vol. ii. chap. vii. sect. 4.
rally speaking, much more rational, or more practically beneficial, than the gross ideas of the vulgar. For, though it cannot be denied that some of them argued in a very able and satisfactory manner in favour of the wisdom and benevolence of divine providence, yet, there was not one among them who taught or believed the proper unity of God; there was not one who did not publicly avow and teach, that the Gods of every country were to be worshiped agreeably to the rites and customs of the country.\(^9\)

Now turn your attention to an ignorant, barbarous, and insignificant people, confined within the narrow limits of Palestine,

\(^9\) Xenophon, in his Memorabilia, (lib. i. cap. 1.) expresses his astonishment that Socrates should be charged with denying the gods of his country, when he often offered sacrifices, both at home, and at the public altars, and openly practised divination. And at the close of his admirable discourse upon divine providence, Socrates cites the authority of the Delphic oracle, to prove that the gods in every country ought to be worshiped agreeably to the customs of the country. Lib. iv, cap. 3.
surrounded by these powerful, polished, and enlightened nations; despised, subdued, and trampled upon by them. Inquire into their theological system. The first, the fundamental article of their creed is the unity of God. "That Jehovah their God is one Jehovah." This is a doctrine in which they are all agreed: concerning which there is no hesitation, no controversy; it is the established inviolable religion of the country: and further, the direct object of the whole frame of their government, and of all their political institutions, is, to support the simple and essential truth, that God is one.

And of this one glorious Being, the sole object of their homage and adoration, it was their steadfast and unanimous belief, that he was the Creator, the Preserver, the Proprietor, and the Governour of the universe, and of all its inhabitants; that by the word of the Lord were the heavens

10 Deut. chap. vi. verse 4.
made, and all the hosts of them by the breath of his mouth: that he spake, and it was done: he commanded, and all things stood fast: that the sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land: that he created man after his own image, and that he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life: that he is the preserver of man and beast: that from everlasting to everlasting he is God: that he fills heaven and earth with his presence: that his understanding is infinite: that he seeth the end from the beginning: that he understandeth the thoughts afar off: that he is excellent in power, and in wisdom: abundant in justice, and goodness, and truth: that he is good to all: that his tender mercies are over all his works: that he loveth righteousness, and hateth iniquity: and that though, for wise reasons, he suffered himself for a time to be worshiped by a splendid and magnificent ritual, yet, that costly sacrifices, and ceremonial institutes, were never accepted as substitutes for moral virtue, which was indispensably necessary for obtaining the divine
favour; and, finally, it was a known and acknowledged truth, that the great duty which the Lord their God required of them, was to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God.

Whence then had these men this knowledge? How came these ignorant and despised Jews to form and cherish notions concerning God, his attributes, and government, so much superior to those of their polished neighbours? Did they reason themselves into these conclusions? They do not even pretend to it. Though not inferior in natural capacity, yet they do not appear to have been distinguished above other nations by their intellectual powers. There is little argument upon the subject of the divine attributes, and still less upon the divine unity, in the Hebrew scriptures: from beginning to end, all is the language

of authority and command. "I am God, and there is none beside me." "Thou shalt have no other God but me." And though we, who have been educated in the belief that God is One, can produce plausible arguments in favour of the unity of God, from the unity of design in the works of nature, from the want of evidence of the contrary doctrine, from the impossibility of conceiving of two infinite Beings, and the like; yet, it is highly probable, that these arguments would never have been discovered by the unassisted light of nature, or that they would not have been deemed satisfactory: at least, it is certain, that they escaped the notice of the most enlightened sages of heathen and Jewish antiquity.

Whence then this firm belief, this unhesitating conviction, this uniform and universal persuasion, that God is One, and that the one God is absolute in all perfection? It was by revelation from Heaven, and by that alone. This fact, the written histories of this extraordinary peo-
and this account is credible, for such knowledge could not have been acquired in any other way.

That the history of this revelation, as it is contained in the Jewish scriptures, is in the main true, appears likewise to be highly probable. For the Jewish history is the fairest, and most impartial, that ever was written by native historians. Look into the histories of Greece and Rome, as they are composed by the most celebrated historians of those celebrated people. What are they, in general, but oblique panegyrics upon their respective nations? National crimes are concealed, or palliated; national virtues are emblazoned, and exhibited in the most conspicuous light. All their counsels are wise: all their wars are just: all their chiefs are generous, patriotic, and brave. But turn your attention to the Jewish records, and what picture do they present? They describe a nation distinguished, beyond all others, by divine manifestations; but, at the same time, equally distinguished
for stupidity, for obstinacy, for ingratitude, and rebellion; and whose chiefs were disgraced by the foulest crimes. Of these striking facts, infidelity has taken an ungenerous advantage, and has vainly hoped to give a mortal wound to the divine authority of the Jewish revelation, by exposing, and malignantly dilating upon, the errors and the vices of the Jewish people and their leaders. But surely, however such narratives, and the encomiums occasionally passed upon some dubious, not to say, flagitious characters, may impeach the virtue of the hero, or the judgment of the historian, they afford the strongest possible evidence of the fidelity and impartiality of the history. If, then, we give entire credit to the evil that is recorded of the Jewish nation, let us, in common candour and common equity, give at least some credit to the good. Believe, if you please, upon the authority of their own national records, that the Jews were a stupid, an obstinate, and a hardened people; but believe also, upon the same authority, confirmed as it is by the reason
of the thing, that they were a people favoured with divine communications. Admit, upon the faith of the Jewish historians, that Jacob was a dissembler, that David was an adulterer and a murderer, and that Solomon was an idolater and a voluptuary; but admit likewise, upon the credit of the same impartial writers, that Moses was a divinely authorized legislator, and that Isaiah was an inspired prophet. To believe all the evil, and to discredit all the good; to admit every thing that is criminal and disgraceful, and, at the same time, to reject every thing which tends to the credit of the nation, can never be reconciled to justice and equity, nor to any principles of fair and liberal criticism.

12 The correct morality of the Jewish code, the purity of the Mosaic institute, and its general tendency to encourage virtue, and good manners, at a time when the institutes of the heathen nations, and the flagitious examples of their false deities, prompted and authorized the most licentious practices, and the most odious crimes, form a strong presumptive argument in favour of the divine legation of the Hebrew legislator. This argument is stated and illustrated, with his usual perspicuity and ability, by Dr. Priestley in his Discourses on the Evidences of Revealed Religion, at Philadelphia, A. D. 1796.
That the Jews were favoured with a divine revelation, is further apparent,

Secondly, from the prophecies which are contained in the Jewish scriptures, many of which are already fulfilled, and some are at this day receiving their accomplishment.

To enter into a critical detail of the prophecies of the Old Testament would greatly exceed the limits of this discourse. I shall satisfy myself with hinting at a few of the most important. The prophecies which may be alleged as proofs of divine communications to the Jewish nation are, either those which relate to the Jews themselves, or those which apply to the surrounding nations.

1. Of the prophecies which relate to the Jews themselves, some of the most

---

N* iii.—vi. and likewise in his excellent work entitled, A Comparison of the Institutions of Moses, with those of the Hindoos, and other ancient Nations.
considerable are those which predict the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, and their subsequent restoration to their own country, which are to be found in the books of Isaiah, Hosea, and Jeremiah: the latter of whom expressly limits the duration of the captivity to seventy years. But the most extraordinary prophecy concerning the Hebrew nation, is contained in some of the last chapters of the book of Deuteronomy: in which, the apostasy of the Jews, the calamities with which they should be visited, the desolation of their country, their dispersion through all nations, and the ignominious and distressing circumstances in which they should be involved, are foretold by Moses; and the accomplishment of these

13 Jer. xxv. 11, 12, "And these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years: and it shall come to pass when seventy years are accomplished, that I will visit upon the king of Babylon, and upon his nation, saith Jehovah, their iniquity, &c." Chap. xxix. 10, "Thus saith the Lord, After seventy years be accomplished at Babylon, I will visit you, and perform my good word towards you, in causing you to return to this place."
prophecies is attested by the whole public history of the Jewish nation, and even by the state in which that extraordinary people is placed at the present day. The twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy contains so exact and circumstantial a description of the sufferings of the Jews under the Roman power, and of the miseries which have since overwhelmed that wretched nation, that if we were not absolutely assured, beyond the possibility of doubt, that the prophecy was written some thousand years before the event, it might be suspected to have been a forgery of modern times 14.

2. With respect to those prophecies which relate to the political state of the surrounding nations. In the first place, it is predicted concerning Ishmael,

14 Bishop Newton on the Prophecies, Diss. vii. David Lévi's Dissertations on the Prophecies of the Old Testament, Introduction. This learned and honest Rabbi, has here given a very striking illustration of the accomplishment of the prophecies of Moses, in the present miserable and degraded state of the Hebrew nation.
from whom the Arabians claim to be descended, that "his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and that he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren." This prediction is remarkably verified in the character and condition of his posterity to this day. The Arabians are public robbers: the enemies of all mankind: yet, they have always been, and still remain, an independent and unconquered people.

Concerning Tyre, it is foretold by the prophet Ezekiel, "I will make thee like the top of a rock: thou shalt be a place to spread nets upon: thou shalt be built no more; for I, the Lord, have spoken it, saith the Lord God." Such is the present actual state of this once opulent and flourishing city, the great emporium of the commerce of the world.

Concerning Egypt, it is foretold by the

same prophet: "Thus saith the Lord God, I will destroy their idols, and I will cause their images to cease, and there shall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt."

When this prophecy was delivered, Egypt was in the plenitude of its power, a prosperous and a mighty nation, under the government of its native princes. Soon afterwards it was subdued by, and subjected to, the Babylonian power. When Babylon fell, Egypt became subject to Persia: and when the Persian empire was overthrown, it was seized by the Macedonians: from them it was taken by the Romans; and, in the decline of the empire it became a province of the Eastern division. The Greeks were expelled by the Saracens; and these by the Turks and Mamalukes. The wretched situation of that ill-fated country, at present, is well known; and whatever its future destiny may be, there is as yet no prospect that the prophecy, which has been fulfilling for two thousand years, should now fail,

17 Ezek. xxx. 13. Newton, ibid. Diss. xii.
and that Egypt should again be governed by a native prince.

But the most extraordinary and astonishing prophecies of this class, are those which relate to the conquest, and to the utter destruction of Babylon; the circumstances of which are foretold with wonderful variety and precision, by the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. It is predicted in general, that Babylon shall be punished for her pride and insolence, and particularly for her cruelty to her Jewish captives. The very nations are named by which this conquest was to be effected; and the future warlike character of the Medes and Persians is described, at a time when they were an obscure and barbarous people, and when Babylon was rising to the zenith of her glory. It is foretold, that the capture of Babylon should be preceded by a long and bloody war; the time is fixed when the destruction of this proud city should commence; and the prince who was to be the instrument of divine providence in the accomplishment of this great
event is described, and even named, a hundred and fifty years before his birth. It is foretold, that the destruction of Babylon should be sudden, and unexpected: that the city should be taken by stratagem: that the capture should be occasioned by the drying up of the river: and that this calamity should happen in a season of festivity and riot. The miserable fate of her impious and cruel tyrant, is prefigured in very sublime language by the prophet Isaiah. And lastly, it is foretold, that Babylon should be left desolate: that it should be totally deserted by its inhabitants: that the ground upon which it stood should become a wild and dismal morass, frequented only by animals of the most noxious and loathsome kind; and finally, that this great city should be so totally exterminated, that the very situation of it should be forgotten.\(^{18}\)

\(^{18}\) See Isaiah, chap. xiii. xiv. xxii. xxiv. xliv. xlvi. Jer. chap. xx. 1. li. Bishop Newton on the Prophecies, Diss. x.; also, the late learned Bp. of London's Notes on the Prophecies of Isaiah; and Dr. Blayney's on those of Jeremiah. An account of the magnitude and grandeur of Babylon is given in Pri
That all these circumstances were fully verified, in the fall and final extermination of that once immense and magnificent city, is known to all who are acquainted with its history; nor is it necessary, at present, to enter into the detail. It will be sufficient to hint at two circumstances, which add greatly to the credit of the prophecy. The first is, that the historians of the event were heathen writers\(^9\), who were perfect strangers to the existence of the prediction, and who could have no intention to support its credit. The second is, that the state of Babylon, at the present day, is a standing public verification of the prophetic word. So completely is that superb metropolis annihilated, that no trace of it now remains; it is not even known where that great city stood, which was once the glory of

---

\(^9\) Herodotus, lib. i. sect. 190 et seq. Xenophon, Cyropaed, lib. vii.
kingdoms, and the pride and wonder of the world 20.

Upon the whole, though the argument from prophecy will necessarily appear with different degrees of force to different persons, in correspondence with their different states of mind, and habits of thinking, and means of information, I cannot but think that the prophecies contained in the Jewish scriptures, when duly and impartially considered, afford a very substantial and satisfactory proof, that the Jewish nation was favoured with a revelation from God; the great design of which, was to establish, and to support, the belief of

---

"See an excellent note of Bishop Lowth upon Isa. xiii. 19. "Jerome," says this learned writer, "observes that in his time it was quite in ruins, and that the walls served only for the enclosure of a park or forest for the king's hunting. Modern travellers, who have endeavoured to find the remains of it, have given but a very unsatisfactory account of their success. What Benjamin of Tudela, and Pietro della Valle, supposed to have been some of its ruins, Tavernier thinks are the remains of some late Arabian building. Upon the whole, Babylon is so utterly annihilated, that even the place where this wonder of the world stood, cannot now be determined with any certainty."
the divine unity and perfection, amidst the ignorance and idolatry of the surrounding nations.

It remains, briefly to state the testimony which is borne to the divine mission of Christ, by the prophets of the Jewish dispensation.

Our Lord and his apostles continually appeal to the Jewish scriptures, as to a direct and proper proof of the divinity of his mission. "Search the scriptures, for they testify of me." "Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me." These are the words of Jesus himself. And the apostle Paul reasoned with the Jews at Thessalonica out of the scriptures, "opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and this Jesus whom I preach unto you, is the Christ."

Now, that there are declarations and prophecies in the Old Testament, which

---

21 John v. 39. 46, 47. 22 Acts xvii. 2, 3.
are calculated to excite an expectation of the appearance of a great prophet and lawgiver, about the time when Jesus exercised his personal ministry among them, is evident, from the well known and undeniable fact, that such an expectation was actually excited. That this expectation prevailed among the Jews of that age, is incontestably manifest from the testimony of the Christian scriptures, and the history of Josephus. It was with difficulty that the multitude, after seeing our Lord's miracles, were prevented from acknowledging him as the expected deliverer, and from compelling him to assume


Josephus says, "But that which principally encouraged them to the war, was an ambiguous oracle found likewise in the sacred writings, that about that time, some one from their country should obtain the empire of the world. This they understood to belong to themselves; and many of the wise men were mistaken in their judgment of it, for the oracle intended Vespasian's government, who was proclaimed emperor in Judea." Josephus de Bell. Jud. i. vi. c. v. sect. 4.
the character of a prince and a conqueror. It is even certain, that this expectation prevailed among the heathen nations in the vicinity of Judea. Tacitus relates, that great numbers were persuaded, that it had been foretold in the ancient and sacred volume of the priests, that at that very time, the East should rise to great power; and that some from Judea should have dominion over the world. And Suetonius adds, that this was an ancient and uniform tradition throughout the East. These writers, naturally enough, apply the predictions to Vespasian and Titus; but they acknowledge that the Jews understood them differently, and applied the prophecies to a deliverer of their own nation.

---


The question therefore to be considered is, what are those passages in the Jewish scriptures which laid the foundation for this general expectation; or, in other words, what are the prophecies of the Messiah in the Old Testament?

Now, in the first place, it is proper to premise, that these prophecies cannot be so numerous as many apprehend: for our Lord, in a short walk of an hour or two, from Jerusalem to Emmaus, began with Moses, and expounded them all to the two disciples whom he joined on the road.

It is also necessary to remark, that we are not to expect that the prophecies

---

27 See upon this subject Bishop Chandler's Defence of Christianity, chap. i. ii. Lardner's Credibility of the Gospel History, part. i. book i. chap. 5.

28 Emmaus was at the distance of about seven miles and a half from Jerusalem, Luke xxiv. 13. See Bp. Pearce in loc. The party could hardly be supposed to occupy more than two or three hours in walking to this village, and in that short space of time, our Lord enumerates, and expounds, all the prophecies relating to himself, that were to be found in the Jewish scriptures, ver. 27. a plain proof, surely, that these prophecies are not so numerous as many well-meaning persons believe,
should be so clear and distinct, as to be perfectly intelligible previous to the event: for in this case, they must often have defeated their own purpose: it being certain, as the apostle well observes, that, if the Jews had known Jesus to be the Messiah, they "would not have crucified the Lord of Glory." The Jews must inevitably have misunderstood their own prophecies: their interpretations therefore must certainly be erroneous, and ought not to be admitted as a rule of judgment by Christian expositors. All that can in reason be expected is, that the prophets should describe circumstances which coincide in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and in no other person that ever existed. I shall select a few of the most important, and of those which are commonly allowed to be the most direct prophecies of Christ, which are contained in the scriptures of the Old Testament; and shall recite them in the words of the most approved translations, with little comment: leaving them to make their own proper impression.

89 1 Cor. ii. 8.
The first which I shall produce, is that celebrated prophecy delivered by Moses, Deut. xviii. 17—19, and applied to Christ by the apostle Peter, Acts iii. 22; and by the holy martyr Stephen, chap. vii. 37. "And the Lord said unto me, I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee; and I will put my words into his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I command him: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken to my words, which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him."

This, say some, refers to a succession of prophets, who should teach the word of God to the Israelites. But, to say the least, the words apply more directly to an individual, than to a collective body; and the apostle's authority ought surely to be admitted as of some weight, especially

---

when it is, in fact, most agreeable to the construction of the text.

I next appeal to that celebrated prophecy, which is contained in the latter part of the fifty-second and the whole of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah: it is a description which literally applies to Jesus of Nazareth, and to no other person whoever lived in the world. The Jews, for the reason I have already mentioned, misunderstood it, or it could never have received its proper accomplishment. But, that any learned Christian expositors should have adopted their erroneous interpretations, and have deprived the Christian religion of one of the strongest testimonies from the prophecies of the Jewish scriptures,

31 "The application of this prophecy to the evangelic history," says Dr. Paley (vol. ii. p. 6.) "is plain and appropriate. Here is no double sense, no figurative language, but what is sufficiently intelligible to every reader of every country. The expressions which require a knowledge of local diction, and of local allusion, are few, and not of great importance; nor have I found, that varieties of reading, or a different construing of the original, produce any material alteration in the sense of the prophecy."
is truly surprising. I shall produce a quotation from this prophecy, from the correct version of a late learned, judicious, and indefatigable inquirer into the holy scriptures; who was also a rational and an eminent christian, and for many years a very respectable member of this congregation.

God is first introduced as speaking. "Behold my servant shall prosper: he

---

32 The Jews interpret this prophecy of the sufferings of their nation, and of its ultimate restoration and prosperity. Dr. Priestley adopts the same interpretation, which he thinks best suits the connection. See his Notes on the Scriptures. Grotius applies the prophecy to Jeremiah, and ultimately to Christ. Rosenmuller, and other German critics, conceive of the whole book, from the fortieth chapter to the end, as not having been written by Isaiah, but by some Jew after the Babylonian captivity. The evidence which these learned critics have to produce, in favour of this novel and extraordinary hypothesis, has not, I believe, yet appeared in this country; at least, I have not had the good fortune to meet with it.

33 Michael Dodson, Esq. barrister at law, nephew to the late celebrated Mr. Justice Foster. He was well skilled in the Hebrew language, and devoted much of his leisure time to the study of the scriptures. He published a New Translation of Isaiah, A. D. 1790, which, generally speaking, is a considerable improvement upon the elegant translation of Bishop Lowth.
shall be raised aloft and magnified, and very highly exalted. As many persons will be astonished at him; to such a degree will his countenance be disfigured, more than that of man, and his form more than that of the sons of men: so, many nations shall look on him with admiration: even kings shall shut their mouths. For they to whom nothing has been told concerning him shall see, and they who have not heard shall understand.”

After this the Messiah, the holy person who is the subject of the prophecy, is introduced complaining, “O Jehovah, who hath believed our report, and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been manifested?”

The prophet then speaks in his own person, as one transported in vision to the times of the Messiah, and describing what he himself saw. “For he grew up in his sight as a tender sucker, and as a root from a thirsty soil: he had no form, nor any beauty, that we should regard him;
nor was his appearance such that we should desire him. Despised nor accounted in the number of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one who hid his face from us, he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely, our infirmities he took away, and our sicknesses he removed; yet we thought him judicially stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the discipline by which our peace was effected was upon him, and by his bruises we are healed. We, all of us, as sheep have strayed: we have turned aside every one to his own way, and Jehovah has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was brought forth, and being questioned he opened not his mouth. As a lamb he was led to the slaughter; and

---

34 He was brought forth, and being questioned, &c. This alteration was suggested to Mr. Dodson, by his learned friend Dr. Kennicott, and he expected to have found a vindication of it in that great scholar's posthumous work. But in this he was disappointed; he has, however, himself produced very plausible arguments for the most material alterations from the common version.
as a sheep before her shearsers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. In his humiliation his condemnation was extorted: and the men of his generation who will be able to describe? for his life was cut off from the earth; through the wickedness of my people, was he smitten to death. And he was placed with wicked men in his death, and with a rich man is his sepulchre:

35 His condemnation was extorted. Bishop Lowth's translation is, "By an oppressive judgment he was taken off;" but Mr. Dodson has ably vindicated the alteration which he has introduced, upon the authority of the LXX, and of Acts viii. 33. It refers to the eagerness with which a sentence of condemnation upon Christ was extorted from the Roman governor.

36 The men of his generation, &c. Bishop Lowth's translation is, "and the manner of his life who would declare?" which he explains by a lying tradition contained in the Talmud, that no one would appear to bear testimony to the character of Jesus. But though the Bishop defends his interpretation with great ingenuity and learning, Mr. Dodson's is both a more obvious and a more pertinent translation of the text; and he refers it, with great propriety, to the extreme profligacy of the Jewish nation in the age of the Messiah: which he illustrates by the well-known passage from Josephus de Bell. Jud. i. v. c. 13. sect. 6.

37 Smitten to death. Though this is not the reading of any Hebrew manuscript, now extant, there is great reason to believe it was the reading of Origen's copy, and it is adopted by Dr. Kennicott and Dr. Lowth. See De Rossi Var. Lect.
Although he had done no wrong, neither was guile found in his mouth; yet, it pleased Jehovah to crush him with affliction.

Jehovah is now introduced again, foretelling the exaltation and future glory of the Messiah, and the extent and universality of his authority; which necessarily implies, though it does not directly express, his resurrection from the dead. “Since he is made an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the gracious purpose of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand. Of his labour, he shall see the fruit and be satisfied. By his knowledge, my servant shall turn many to righteousness, and their iniquities he shall bear away. Therefore I will distribute to him the many for his portion, and the

The learned author introduces here the two first verses of chap. lvi., which he interprets as a prophecy of Christ’s resurrection: but though it is probable, that these verses are not in their proper place, I cannot say that I feel satisfied with the reasons assigned for inserting them in this connection, in contradiction to all manuscripts, and to every ancient version.
mighty he shall share as a spoil, because he gave himself up to death, and was numbered with transgressors, and he took away the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

This prophecy is so clear and explicit, that it may be safely left to speak for itself: it is often, and justly appealed to, by the apostles and evangelists: and when Philip, by the immediate direction of the holy spirit, went to preach the gospel to the Ethiopian nobleman, he found him in his chariot, reading this very prophecy, and beginning from this memorable passage, he preached to him the gospel of Jesus 39.

It may still be asked what prophecy defines the time when the Messiah was to appear, and what could excite that general expectation of the event, which prevailed at the time of Christ's personal ministry? I acknowledge that I can discover no just foundation for this expectation, but in the

prophecy of Daniel, concerning the seventy weeks: which indeed our Lord himself expressly cites as predicting the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans. It is indeed a prophecy of considerable difficulty. But, perhaps to the Jews of that age, it was more intelligible than it is now to us. Without supposing a wilful corruption of the text, the carelessness of transcribers where numeral characters are concerned, might produce a degree of incorrectness, which the ingenuity of modern criticism may not be able to decypher. But I will state the interpretation, which appears to me the most plausible, from the version of a late eminent and learned professor of the university of Oxford.

40 Matt. xxiv. 15. When ye see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, &c. Comp. Dan. ix. 27.

41 Dr. Blayney, late fellow of Hertford college, and professor of Hebrew in the university of Oxford, who published his Dissertation upon this difficult and important prophecy, A.D. 1775, in which he has with great labour and ingenuity corrected the text from some ancient Hebrew manuscripts, and from what is supposed to be the genuine Septuagint Version, found in the Chigi library, and published at Rome, A.D. 1772. There is so great a disagreement in the copies.
The prophecy is contained in the ninth chapter of the book of Daniel, where it is related, that this prophet consulting the writings of Jeremiah, discovers that the predicted seventy years of captivity were concluded, upon which he offers up a prayer to God for the liberty and restoration of his countrymen. At the conclusion of the prayer, an angel appears to him in vision, and communicates the divine oracle and prophecy.

In the first place, in answer to his humble request, the angel assures him that his countrymen should be soon restored to the land of their ancestors, and that their long and distressing captivity was near its close.

V. 24. "Seventy complete years of rest both of the Hebrew and the Greek, that I am by no means convinced that the true and exact reading or interpretation of this prophecy has yet been extracted, or indeed ever will. But the text, the translation, and the commentary of Dr. Blayney appear to me to be by far the most judicious and the most probable of any which I have yet seen. Dr. Wintle in his new Translation of Daniel published A. D. 1792, has, unnecessarily, loaded the prophecy with a double sense.
(or, desolation) have been upon thy people, and upon thy holy city, to check the revolt, and to put an end to sin, and to bring back the righteousness of ancient times: and to seal the divine oracle, and the prophet, (that is, to authenticate the prophecy of Jeremiah,) and to anoint the most holy things," that is, to purify and consecrate the holy place, Jerusalem and the temple.

After this, the angel interpreter proceeds to announce the advent of the Messiah, and the season when this great event should take place. V. 25, &c.

"And thou shalt know and understand, that from the going forth of a decree to rebuild Jerusalem, unto Messiah the prince, shall be seventy and seven weeks, and threescore and two years: it shall be re-

43 Dr. Blayney's version is "seventy, seventy:" but as he justly observes, the repetition of the same word is often used emphatically, I have altered it to seventy complete years.

44 The LXX version of Daniel published at Rome, reads "seventy and seven times, and three score and two years." This is an important reading, which casts a new light upon the whole prophecy.
built, still enlarging itself, and becoming more and more considerable, even amidst times of distress."

From the decree of Cyrus, which was dated A.C. 536, seventy-seven weeks of years reach down to A.D. 4, and 62 years more extend to A.D. 66, which was the year in which the war with the Romans broke out. During this period, Jerusalem flourished, notwithstanding the wars in which the Jews were engaged, and it became a large, a strong, and an opulent city.

"And after the times seventy and seven and three score and two, Messiah shall cut off from belonging to him, both the city, and the sanctuary. The prince that shall

** It may be difficult to ascertain precisely the exact date from whence the computation was to commence, or the exact length of the prophetic year, whether for example it consisted of 360, or 365 days; but upon every supposition there seems to be sufficient ground to excite a general expectation of the Messiah at the time of Christ's appearance.

" This is an excellent interpretation, fully warranted by the original, and certainly best adapted to the connection. See Blayney's Dissertation, p. 47.
tome shall destroy the people, and the cutting off thereof, shall be with a flood (or hostile invasion), and unto the end of a war carried on with rapidity, shall be desolation. But he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week. And in the midst of the week, he shall cause the sacrifice and the meat offering to cease: and the abomination of desolation shall be upon the border, (encompassing and pressing closely upon the city,) and an utter end, even a speedy one, shall be poured upon the desolate."

The war lasted seven years: the christians, warned by Christ, escaped from the calamities of their country; in the midst of the war, A.D. 70, Jerusalem was taken, sacked, and pillaged, the temple was completely demolished, and a final period was put to the temple service.

---

*Dr. Priestley has published an admirable Dissertation upon this prophecy in his Preliminary Observation to his Harmony of the Evangelists, sect. 3. He in the main agrees with Dr. Blayney: but he dates the seventy-seven weeks from*
Thus it appears, that the scriptures of the Old Testament bear their testimony to the divine mission, and character of Christ, and to the truth of his doctrine: and upon this foundation, in addition to the evidences which I have before detailed, we may safely build our faith and hope.

the decree of Darius Hystaspes, A.C. 510, and striking out ten years from the usual but erroneous computation of the reign of Xerxes, the period terminates A.D. 29, the very year of the public minisry and death of Christ.

* On the subject of prophetic evidence, see Sherlock on Prophecy; Bishop Chandler's Defence of Christianity, and his Vindication of his Defence; Bishop Newton's Dissertations on the Prophecies; and Bishop Hurd's, and other Discourses at Bishop Warburton's Lecture.
DISCOURSE V.

THE PRACTICAL VALUE OF THE CHRISTIAN REVELATION.

TITUS ii. 11—14.

FOR, THE GRACE OF GOD THAT BRINGETH SALVATION HATH APPEARED UNTO ALL MEN, TEACHING US THAT, DENYING UNGODLINESS AND WORLDLY LUSTS, WE SHOULD LIVE SOBERLY, RIGHTEOUSLY, AND GODLY IN THIS PRESENT WORLD. LOOKING FOR THAT BLESSED HOPE, EVEN THE GLORIOUS APPEARANCE OF THE GREAT GOD, AND OF OUR Saviour JESUS CHRIST; WHO GAVE HIMSELF FOR US, THAT HE MIGHT REDEEM US FROM ALL INIQUITY, AND PURIFY UNTO HIMSELF A PECULIAR PEOPLE, ZEALOUS OF GOOD WORKS.

HAVING, in the preceding discourses, stated the evidences of the christian revelation, I now propose briefly to represent its moral use, both, in order to shew that the prize for which we contend is of inestimable value, and to obviate the objections of some who love to under-rate the christian doctrine, and to excuse their own inattention to it, and indifference
about it, by treating it as a speculation of no practical importance.

In the prosecution of this subject, it will be proper in the first place, to take a summary view of the leading articles of the christian faith, and then, to consider their tendency to meliorate the heart, and to regulate the practice.

I. An enlightened and consistent christian believes, that there is one God, one original, eternal, immutable Being; in whom, unlimited intelligence and power are combined with unlimited benevolence: whose design and delight is to communicate happiness. To which end, he has formed a boundless universe, for the sole purpose of dispensing felicity to an innumerable multitude of percipient and intelligent beings of different orders and degrees; and out of all possible systems, has selected that in which the greatest sum of virtue and happiness would be eventually produced. Nor will he permit any mixture of evil, natural or moral, but what will
ultimately be subservient to his benevolent designs; and in his all-comprehending view, all his creatures are, even now, possessed of that perfect happiness for which they are finally destined, and to which their wise and benevolent Creator and Father is conducting them, by various processes of moral discipline and improvement.

The well-informed Christian further believes, from the instruction of Christ, confirmed and exemplified by his resurrection from the dead, that, though to outward appearance, death is the destruction, both of the corporeal form, and of the perceptive principle in man, there will, nevertheless, be a resurrection both of the just and of the unjust; that at this awful crisis, a select, but comparatively small proportion of mankind, in consequence of the virtuous habits which they have acquired by the discipline of life, will be entitled to the reward promised in the gospel, and will immediately be introduced into a state of sublime and con-
summate felicity, adapted to their renovated nature; but that the great mass of mankind will, in consequence of the unrepented vices, and unhallowed habits and affections of their probationary state, be consigned to a condition of proportionate and inexpressible remorse and suffering, till, in the end, all moral diseases shall be cured, vice and misery shall be annihilated, Christ shall subdue all things to himself, death shall be swallowed up in victory, all the rational creation shall become immutably virtuous and happy, and God shall be all in all.

The enlightened believer in the christian doctrine regards the practice of virtue as the best means of happiness; he perceives, that the benevolent Author of nature has constructed the frame of the human mind with such wise and beautiful contrivance, that the happiness of the individual is best promoted, when, in the course of his conduct, he divests himself of all explicit regard to it; and, influenced by no motive but pure disinterested love to God and
man, he devotes himself wholly to the service of his fellow-creatures, in the sphere in which divine providence has placed him, exerting his faculties with the utmost vigour for the general good, and submitting cheerfully to the greatest privations, and the most costly sacrifices, for this purpose; impressed with a firm conviction, that under the government of perfect wisdom and benevolence, he can never be ultimately a loser by pursuing, to the utmost extent, the dictates of his own kind and generous heart, and thus co-operating with, and acting in subserviency to, the great design of the divine government.

II. These are the leading articles of the faith of a truly rational and well-informed believer in the divine mission and doctrine of Christ, and the direct and powerful tendency of these sublime and animating principles and expectations, is to renovate the heart, and to form the character to the love and practice of piety and virtue: or, in the apostle's language, to teach us to
deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world, looking for that blessed hope.

First, with respect to godliness. Those affections of the heart which are due to the Supreme Being, and the cultivation of which will greatly contribute to elevation of character, and to the consolation and improvement of the well-disciplined mind, are chiefly these, Love and Reverence, Gratitude, Confidence, Willingness to obey the divine commands, and Resignation to the dispensations of divine providence.

To love God, is to think upon him, his attributes, and government, with complacency and delight: and if we entertain those sentiments of God, which the christian religion inculcates, it is impossible not to love him: for God is Love. He has no selfish ends in view, in his thoughts and purposes towards the children of men. He formed his creatures to make them
happy; and in due time his benevolent designs shall be carried into complete effect. Under the habitual influence of these impressions, it is impossible to think of God, but with inexpressible delight.

But the Love of God is, and in the present imperfect state it necessarily must be, tempered with a certain degree of fear. Perfect love, indeed, casteth out fear: for it moulds the heart to a complete conformity to the will of God. But fear is the necessary concomitant of imperfect love, and imperfect obedience. For it is the established law of the divine government, that the consequent, and cure, of all moral evil shall be suffering: and experience too plainly demonstrates, that it is no slight, or transient process of discipline, which is needful to the complete extirpation of those follies and vices, which have taken deep root in the human breast. And very few have attained such consummate rectitude of character, as not to be conscious of something amiss, which requires to be rectified; something imperfect, which
needs to be improved. So that few minds can, or indeed, ought to be divested of all anxiety, when they contemplate the character and government of the Supreme Being. Nevertheless, where there is a consciousness of prevailing conformity to the divine will, and a firm conviction of the infinite goodness of God, all slavish fear will be excluded, and all that remains will subside into reverential awe, which, being blended with the delight which results from meditation upon the divine benevolence, will produce that sublime sentiment of rational devotion, which, while it fills the mind with the most exquisite satisfaction, imposes the most powerful restraint upon every vicious affection, and every criminal gratification.

Gratitude is a generous and delightful emotion, which, in every virtuous and feeling mind, associates itself with the idea of a benefactor and a friend. And the christian, who regards the Supreme Being as the Author of his existence, and of all the blessings of life: who is persuaded, that he
is brought into existence for no other purpose than to be made virtuous and happy: who regards all present gratifications, as earnest and pledges of something better still in reversion: who has learned habitually to regard even the disappointments and afflictions of life, as a wise and salutary discipline, intended to prepare and qualify him for more exalted and permanent felicity, cannot contemplate the kindness of his great and munificent benefactor, but with the most exquisite emotions of joy and gratitude.

He that is persuaded that God governs the world, that he invariably pursues the plan originally selected by infinite wisdom and benevolence, of which the happiness of the whole is the main design, and that of every individual forms a glorious and essential part; who firmly believes, that through the whole range of intellectual existence, nothing takes place fortuitously, nothing unforeseen, or unprovided for, in the scheme of all-comprehending wisdom: who believes that all the wills, of all
subordinate agents, are made subservient to the great plan of providence, and that whatever their individual views and purposes may be, they are all occupying the spheres respectively assigned to them, and contributing their part, however unintentionally, to accomplish the wise and kind design of the Conductor of the universal drama: he who entertains these truly philosophical, and truly christian principles and views, cannot but place unlimited confidence in the wisdom and goodness of God, and easily reconciles himself to all events, how contrary soever to his own wishes, views, and expectations. Willing, what God wills, the ultimate virtue and happiness of all, he is desirous that this glorious termination of the divine plan of government should take place in the time, and way, which unerring wisdom has selected as the best. And, though there are difficulties in the divine administration, which no human sagacity can solve, and though events often occur which seem to militate against the wisdom and benevolence of the scheme of providence, yet,
having formed his idea of the attributes and government of God, from the most enlarged views, and upon the most satisfactory evidence, his pious confidence remains unshaken. He still believes, that all will ultimately issue well: and if the ends of the divine government are not accomplished in the mode, and by the instruments, which human sagacity would have prescribed, he is persuaded, that they will be eventually brought to pass, by better means, at a better season, and by more efficacious instruments. His heart is fixed, trusting in God.

Those views of the Supreme Being which are exhibited in the gospel, likewise constitute a powerful motive to cheerful, uniform, and persevering obedience to his revealed will, and to the resolute and active discharge of the duties of life. The true christian regards himself in this world as the soldier at his post, whose honour and delight it is, to yield implicit obedience to the orders of him who has assigned, and who has a right to assign to him, his sta-
tion and his duty. And he is encouraged to this, by the consideration that the commands of his sovereign Chief are not grievous: that they are not arbitrary and capricious, but wise and just: that, nothing is required beyond his capacity and strength: that, by voluntary obedience, he actively co-operates with God in carrying into effect his wise and gracious designs: and that, the more zealous and resolute he is in the performance of duty, the greater will be the peace and satisfaction of his own mind: the more extensive his usefulness, the more acceptable will his conduct be, and the more distinguished his final reward.

Lastly, Right apprehensions of God, such as the christian doctrine excites in the well-informed mind, will discipline the heart to humble **resignation**, and to dutiful acquiescence in the divine dispensations; it will bow the will of man to the will of God. Affliction to such an one, wears a soothing and friendly aspect. When deprived of those objects, which
all who have the feelings of human nature must hold dear: when stripped of fortune, of liberty, or of fame: when bereaved of tender relatives and faithful friends, he submits with fortitude, not because necessity is uncontrollable, and grief is unavailing, but, because he looks to God as the first Cause, and proper Author, of all events; and he considers these afflic-tive dispensations, as forming a necessary part of a plan, upon the whole, the wisest and the best; and as what will ultimately prove most beneficial even to himself. And, if he should be disappointed in that which lies nearest to his heart, in any schemes which he may have formed for promoting the improvement and happiness of his fellow-creatures, he is content to be laid aside, happy in the consciousness of his own intentions and exertions, assured that he will not ultimately fail of his promised reward, and rejoicing in the persuasion, that God will never be at a loss for carrying on, in the most effic-a-cious manner, the cause of truth and
virtue, which is his own glorious cause, and which must ultimately and universally prevail.

Secondly, The principles of the christian religion are a powerful motive to social virtue.

All social virtue is summed up in benevolence. The law of nature, and of reason, requires us to promote the happiness of all to the utmost extent of our capacity: and similar to this is the requisition of the christian law; “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

The christian religion strictly enjoins an inflexible regard to truth and fidelity, to justice, honour, and integrity, in all our social transactions: to sympathy, liberality; and charity: to a faithful and conscientious discharge of all relative and social duties: it absolutely prohibits all falsehood, fraud, treachery, malice, hatred, and revenge: it requires, love to
enemies, active exertions in doing good, and an habitual disposition to sacrifice private interest to public advantage.

The all-wise and benevolent Author of nature has placed men in circumstances, which necessarily generate the kind and generous affections: and that man is commonly most happy in himself, and most esteemed and beloved by others, who exerts himself most prudently and actively in doing good, and who makes the greatest sacrifice of his own interest, to the benefit of others. The Christian religion does not, in the least degree, diminish the obligation of the law of nature; on the contrary, it is intended to confirm and establish it, and to enforce its obligation by demonstrating its justice and excellence, and by evincing the wisdom of the moral constitution of the human mind.

Nothing can be more evident, than that in consequence of those benevolent and disinterested affections, which are unavoidably generated by the circumstances
in which they are placed, and the impressions to which they are exposed, men are often induced to make great sacrifices of ease and interest to the good of others, where there is no probable prospect of adequate recompence. Nor would it be easy for such as reject the christian religion, and with it the doctrine of a future life, to show the propriety, or even the justice of this constitution of nature; or the obligation which moral agents are under, to make these great sacrifices to the good of others. But the christian doctrine unravels the mystery of human nature, and demonstrates, that these generous propensities, so beneficial to the species, are not injurious to the virtuous individual; for, that under the divine government, no sacrifice for the good of others, however valuable, shall fail of receiving an adequate reward. Thus it proves that self-love and social are the same; and teaches its professors that the wisest method of securing their own ultimate interest, is by self-annihilation; that is, by an habitual readiness to make every necessary sacrifice of temporary in-
terest, and present gratification, to the sublime object of doing good, of relieving misery, and promoting happiness. Hence it is, that Christian benevolence is a permanent and active principle: and that the exercise of it is not obstructed, either by the opinions of others, who are prone to calumniate extraordinary efforts of disinterested virtue, or, by an undue regard to self-interest, or, even by that which too often occurs, and which tends more than any other consideration to damp the feelings of generosity, the insensibility, the ingratitude, and the unkind returns, of those for whose benefit, the tenderest solicitude has been felt, and the most unremitting exertions have been made. For the truly enlightened Christian, whose heart glows with the genuine spirit of the gospel, has no other view in the exercise of his benevolence, than that of doing all the good in his power, looking for no other reward, than the consciousness of his own kind and generous intention, and the ultimate approbation of Him, to whom all hearts
are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid. Hence he finds little difficulty in obeying the divine precept, which requires love to enemies: regarding all the malice and envy of men, as founded in error, and injurious only to themselves, he is solicitous to apply lenitives to this mental disease, by accumulated acts of disinterested kindness, to melt the cold, or the malignant heart, into ingenuous contrition, and thus to overcome evil with good.

The well-informed, and sincere believer in Christ, regards all his fellow-creatures as children of the same parent, and destined, ultimately, to the same state of virtue and happiness: and, where he sees any of his brethren wandering in the paths of error and vice, prompted by generous pity, he will earnestly use every practicable means for their instruction and reformation, that so, they may escape the fearful doom to which they are hasting, and the insufferable pains, which, by divine
appointment, and in the nature of things, are the inevitable consequence of unrepented vice.

How happy would this world be, if the principles of the christian religion were universally diffused, and suffered, without controul, to produce their genuine effects! The selfish affections would all be absorbed in love to God, and benevolence to man, and the primary concern of all, would be to promote the happiness of all. Every malignant passion would be extinguished: and love, and peace, and happiness would universally prevail. What friend to mankind would not wish to accelerate the approach of this glorious and happy state?

Thirdly. Such is the direct and powerful tendency of christian principles, to produce the divine and social virtues; it is proper to add, what indeed is sufficiently obvious, that they equally tend to the encouragement of the personal virtues, of temperance, purity, and self-government. Observation
and experience combined with good sense demonstrate the necessity of exercising a strict discipline over the appetites and passions, without which there can be no tranquillity of mind, and no true enjoyment of life. The Christian revelation enforces the same conclusion, by the authority of an omniscient God, and by the awful sanctions of a future life.

From what has been advanced, we may justly infer, that the character of an enlightened and consistent Christian, is a sublime, a dignified, and an eminently useful character: and that the tendency of Christian principles is to conduct the mind to the highest attainments in wisdom and virtue, and to elevate human nature, to its happiest and most perfect state.

It is true, that this effect is not completely produced in any human character, and the history of the world supplies us with one example only of consummate virtue. But though human frailty, under the best culture, falls short of absolute
perfection, it is nevertheless evident that the direct tendency of christian principles is to meliorate and exalt the character, and that in proportion as they prevail, they greatly improve the condition, both of individuals and of society, though by countervailing influences, they are prevented from producing all those beneficial effects to which they naturally tend.

If it should be alleged, that the light of nature furnishes sufficient motives to virtue, independent of the christian revelation, the proper reply is, that the light of nature can afford no satisfactory evidence of the doctrine of a future life, without which, the moral constitution of human nature is an inexplicable enigma. The christian revelation completely solves this difficult and interesting problem, and by extending the views and expectations of mankind, to a state of just retribution beyond the grave, it stamps an infinite value upon the human character, and communicates unspeakable energy to the motives to virtue.
DISCOURSE VI.

THE SUBSERVIENTY OF KNOWLEDGE TO VIRTUE.

INTRODUCTORY TO A COURSE OF LECTURES UPON
THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES.

JOHN xvii. 3.

AND THIS IS LIFE ETERNAL, THAT THEY MIGHT KNOW THEE, THE ONLY TRUE GOD, AND JESUS CHRIST WHOM THOU HAST SENT.

As I am about to commence a course of lectures, the design of which is to communicate some useful knowledge to those young persons, who, in a thoughtless and dissipated age, are laudably studious of Christian truth, it may not be improper, by way of introduction, to offer to their serious and candid attention, a few observations upon the great importance of moral and religious knowledge, and to show how essential right sentiments are to a right practice, and to the attainment of the ultimate and complete reward of virtue. Agreeable to this is the declaration of our
Lord, which I have just read, that this is life eternal, or, in other words, the best means of attaining eternal happiness, namely, to know thee, the only true God, to form just and honourable conceptions of the divine character, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent, to be duly acquainted with the mission and doctrine of Christ, the prophet and messenger of God. For this knowledge, these right apprehensions concerning God and Christ, are the proper basis of that excellence of character, that holiness of heart and life, which, by the tenor of the gospel covenant, is the essential qualification for future felicity.

Knowledge is the perception of truth, or, the right apprehension of the existence, the properties, the powers, and the tendencies of things. It is acquired by experience, and observation, by reasoning, and testimony.

It has been well observed by the father of modern philosophy, that, knowledge is power. The justice of this maxim is
universally allowed in physics; and in the moral world, it may with equal propriety be asserted, that knowledge is virtue. Or, in other words, that moral and religious knowledge is as intimately connected with the practice of virtue, and as essential to it, as the knowledge of the powers of nature is with the invention and improvement of the arts and manufactures, and to the purposes of human life. Hence it is, that in the proverbs of Solomon, virtue is uniformly distinguished by the name of wisdom, and vice, by that of folly.

Virtue, is that combination of habits, and course of conduct, which is productive of the greatest ultimate happiness of man. Vice, is the reverse of this: it is that system of habits, and that tenor of conduct, which tends to misery, or, at least, to the diminution of happiness. And the very definitions of both, obviously point out the direct and necessary tendency of moral and religious knowledge, to virtue and happiness, and of ignorance and error, to vice and misery.
The objects of knowledge are various: and though all are in some degree connected with each other, yet as the human mind is contracted in its comprehension, no individual can embrace the whole compass of science, and indeed, very few can comprehend any considerable variety of subjects. It is not then every kind of knowledge which is productive of virtue, but chiefly, that of which virtue is the principal topic, the science, as it may properly be called, of theology and morals: the sublimest of all sciences, and perhaps not the most easy of attainment, at least, if we judge by the gross errors into which many persons, and those not always the most ignorant and illiterate, fall upon these subjects. It is a common opinion that knowledge has little or no connection with virtue, and piety, because men who excel in abstract, or physical science, sometimes appear to be sceptics in religion, and defaulters in virtue. This, however, is not a fair conclusion; for how profound soever the speculations of such persons may be upon other subjects, they are often mere novices
in the science of morals, and striplings in
the truest and the best philosophy. But,
that a person who has paid the same atten-
tion to these interesting subjects, which is
directed by others to those branches of sci-
ence in which they are ambitious to excel,
and, who in consequence of impartial and
laborious inquiry, has attained just senti-
ments of religion and morals, should, at
the same time, be practically vicious, is,
I believe, a very uncommon case. I will
not say that it has never happened. But,
it is most certain, that persons of this
description must have been placed in cir-
cumstances peculiarly disadvantageous, if
these circumstances were capable of coun-
teracting the valuable impressions, which
are the natural result of the steady, ha-
bitual contemplation of moral truth.

True science is equally remote from
credulity, and from scepticism. It be-
lieves nothing without proper evidence.
It rejects nothing which is proved by sound
argument. It seeks only for truth; and
examines every question impartially, and
with attention proportioned to its importance. Nothing is more easy, and nothing more common, than the two extremes, of believing every thing, and believing nothing. But, as both are inconsistent with sound judgment, so both are unfavourable to the formation of a virtuous and elevated character.

The most common case is that of credulity. Most persons content themselves with believing all that they have been taught; they have had no opportunity of inquiring into the truth of their opinions; it has never occurred to them, that their creed may be erroneous, and they are offended with those who would put them upon inquiry into subjects, which they are willing to believe to be of no great importance, or which they regard as too sacred to be meddled with, and too firmly established to be disputed.

This state of mind is perhaps excusable in persons of a certain age, whose prejudices are inveterate and incurable: who
have never been in the habits of inquiry and reflection, in whom a revolution of opinion would not be accomplished without great difficulty, and would be attended with little practical advantage. Persons of this description may well be permitted to pass on to the close of life unmolested. The active and enlightened friends of truth must not, indeed, expect always to escape the censure of such, even while they respect their prejudices; but such censures they may return with pity. To such persons, the rapid progress of christian knowledge, the light of which is so offensive to their dim intellectual eye, and the advancement of which is so little impeded by their feeble opposition, is itself a sufficient punishment.

But the apology which is admissible for advanced age, is by no means to be allowed in the prime of life, and in the vigour of the faculties. You, my young friends, have, no doubt, been educated by your virtuous relatives in that system of doctrine which they thought most
agreeable to truth, and most favourable to virtue; and happy will it be, if after due examination, you shall see reason to retain and acquiesce in it as such. This is a privilege beyond the common lot, which you cannot too highly value, and for which you can hardly be sufficiently thankful. But, if you regard your reputation amongst the truly wise, or your peace of mind, and your usefulness in life, be assured, that you must not take your religious principles upon trust. You have leisure, ability, and opportunity to inquire, and the subject is of sufficient importance to challenge your most serious attention. It is, therefore, your indispensable duty, for the faithful discharge of which you are responsible to God and man, to pass in review the moral and theological principles of your education, that you may retain, and impress deeply upon your memory and heart, those which upon inquiry appear to be true and important; and may, after due examination, discard those principles, however cherished or patronized, which are found to be er-
roneous, or unsupported by competent evidence.

There is, however, another extreme, equally dangerous with that of credulity; and against which, in times like the present, it is equally necessary to be upon the guard. I mean that of scepticism—of believing nothing: an extreme this, to which, in the present age, there is a peculiar tendency. There is, sometimes, in mind, an inertia similar to that of matter. When it has once taken a direction, it is with difficulty stopped. Young persons, when they begin to review the principles of their early years, and see reason to discard one prejudice after another, are sometimes ready to save themselves the trouble of further research, by discarding every thing at once; especially, if they conceive, that they may be able at this cheap rate to purchase the reputation of a philosophical superiority to vulgar prejudice.

It is, however, plain, that no mind is
so feeble as not to be capable of such an effort, or rather, of such a want of effort, as this. For to believe nothing, all that is necessary is, not to think nor to inquire about any thing: and I have no doubt, that scepticism is much more frequently the result of indolence, or inattention, than of inquiry. One thing, however, is self-evident: that unbelief is not knowledge; for real knowledge consists in the perception of truth, in discriminating evidence, in retaining what is established by proof, in rejecting what is erroneous, and in suspending the assent where evidence is doubtful. And, this state of mind is only to be attained by patient thought, by diligent inquiry, and by serious impartial examination.

The great question, of which we are now seeking the true solution, is this: What are the best means of securing, to every individual, his own greatest ultimate felicity? This is a question of the highest importance. It is a problem which is worth solving. For, happiness is the
only quality which gives value to existence, and without which, being would not be worth acceptance.

Nor is the solution of this interesting question quite so easy as many seem to apprehend; nor, indeed, is it reasonable to expect that it should be effected without labour: for, is it easy to ascertain the surest method of attaining success in any art or science, in any occupation or profession in life? Is it then reasonable to expect, that the sublimest of all sciences, the most useful of all arts, the science of moral wisdom, the art of securing the highest happiness, should be acquired without proportionable exertion of mental vigour and active research?

How stands the fact? Are there many who succeed in the arts of life? Are there many fortunate candidates for the prize of opulence, of ambition, of fame, or of science? Are there not multitudes who start in the race, and but few who reach the goal? And is happiness, the highest
happiness of men, a prize more easily attainable than honour and wealth? Are we not taught by the highest authority, that "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leads to life, and few there be who find it?" And does not universal experience confirm the awful declaration?

I now proceed to state some of the most important articles, concerning which, it is of the highest moment to attain correct and satisfactory information, in order to guide the footsteps in the search after happiness; and the true knowledge of which, is essential to the attainment of moral excellence. And

I. First, It is necessary to attain correct notions concerning the existence, the character, and the government of God.

1. You have always been taught to believe in the existence of an original and Almighty Being; your Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor. You cannot even recollect the time when you did not admit this impor-
tant truth, nor the manner in which it was first implanted in your breast. And great, my young friends, are your obligations to your virtuous parents and instructors, for the benevolent pains which they have taken to impress this first and best principle early and deeply upon your hearts. But, it is now your duty to bring even this doctrine, sacred and important as it is, to the test of reason: that your faith, as reasonable beings, may rest upon rational principles, and not upon human authority, however great and respectable. Nor need you hesitate to enter upon the inquiry; for, truth never shuns the light; but invites, and will stand the test of, the severest examination. You will think therefore, and you will read, upon this important question: and I have no doubt, that you will speedily attain rational satisfaction. The footsteps of a God are imprinted upon all the works of nature; and, you will readily conclude, that if a watch, a house, or a ship, could not begin to exist without a designing cause, much less could the infinitely more curious
structure of a vegetable, of an animal, or of a human being, rise into existence of itself, without the intervention of intelligence or power. And the more you reflect upon these, and other arguments for the divine existence, the greater satisfaction you will attain.

2. Having thus settled in your minds, a firm conviction of the existence of an original, intelligent, and powerful Being, upon whom you, and all creatures, depend for existence and happiness, your next inquiry will be, into the character of this Almighty Sovereign; for by knowing this, you will learn what chance you stand for happiness, and by what means you may obtain the favour of him who has the entire disposal of your lot.

The next question, therefore, the true solution of which you will anxiously investigate, will be, What is God? Of his existence, I am certain. Of his intelligence and power, I can entertain no reasonable doubt. But, what is the true character of
this great and awful Being? And what are his purposes towards his creatures? Is he, as some love to represent him, an arbitrary and malignant tyrant? Has he formed an universe for the purpose of dooming his creatures to hopeless and eternal misery, with the exception of a chosen few, whom he has selected by arbitrary will to life and happiness?

If, indeed, you find reason to believe, that this is a just character of the Maker and Lord of all, very trifling, and very precarious, will be your chance of escape from the general wreck. And if you have the feelings of humanity, you will contemplate such a Being with horror and indignation; the thought of God must be a constant source of terror and dismay, and the lot of reasonable creatures will be a thousand fold more pitiable than that of the unreflecting brute. Nay, if you should even persuade yourselves of the very improbable fact, that you are yourselves of the small number of the elect; if you are not lost to every feeling of compassion,
the sad persuasion, that the great mass of your fellow-creatures are doomed to inevitable, intolerable, and everlasting misery, will absorb the transports of joy which you may occasionally experience, from the fond expectation of your own more favoured lot. Or, which is perhaps still more likely to happen, you will learn from the example of your Maker, to hate those who are hated by him, and to feel a malignant satisfaction in the contemplation of their approaching ruin.

But before you finally acquiesce in these gloomy and revolting conceptions of the divine character, which must necessarily cast a shade of the deepest horror over every stage of your existence, you will, at least, think it of some moment to inquire, whether there be any just grounds for these formidable apprehensions? You will naturally ask yourselves, Is it probable that a Being of infinite intelligence and power should delight in making his creatures miserable? Does the state of things in the world at all correspond with
such a conclusion? Is misery the rule, and happiness the exception, in the works of God? Or rather, do we not everywhere see the reverse of this supposition? Do not the pleasures, in general, preponderate over the pains of existence? Are not the tendencies of things to melioration and improvement, in indefinite and continually accelerated progression? Are not evils themselves made subservient to good? And can any proof be alleged, that the state of things might possibly have been more wisely and beneficially arranged than it is at present? But if these facts are substantiated—and who can call them in question?—then, verily, God is good. And if benevolent, he must be perfectly benevolent. For what can limit original, essential, immutable goodness? But if God be perfectly benevolent, his creatures are made for happiness, and they then best answer the end of their existence, and are most acceptable to him, when they cooperate with him in his benevolent designs, and are most judiciously and actively employed in doing good. Who does
not see the natural and necessary tendency of these worthy and exalted sentiments of the Supreme Being, to purify and elevate the mind? to generate love to God, and benevolence to man? and, to inspire the heart with habitual confidence and joy, and with humble dutiful resignation to the divine will?

II. Being thus satisfied with respect to the existence and character of God, your next inquiry will be, and a very important question it is, whether there is any reason to believe that man will exist hereafter? or, whether it is most reasonable to expect that human existence terminates at death? And, if you are wise, you will govern your practice by the result of this inquiry.

I do not indeed deny, that the general conduct of a wise man will be nearly the same, whether the doctrine of a future life be admitted, or rejected. Self-government, and active benevolence, are commonly the best means of attaining happi-
ness, both here and hereafter. But certain cases will occasionally occur, and indeed, not unfrequently, in which much good may be done by self-denial, by foregoing present gratification and temporal interest, and sometimes, even by the resignation of life itself; and I feel no hesitation in contending, that if the doctrine of a future life be denied, the obligation to these sacrifices can never be made apparent or convincing.

Here, then, we learn the unspeakable value of the Christian revelation. I am much impressed with, what are called, the natural arguments for the doctrine of a future life. The index of nature points to this important issue. The appearances of the moral world seem to warrant the same conclusion. There are difficulties which vanish instantaneously before the hypothesis of a future life, but which, upon any other supposition, admit no clear and satisfactory solution. I see that man, unlike the brute creation, is capable of looking forward to a new state of existence,
and of governing his conduct by the hopes and fears of a future life. I see a state of existence, in which good generally preponderates, terminating in pain; which, contrary to the usual analogy of things, appears to answer no beneficial purpose. I see a magnificent apparatus provided for the discipline of the human mind in its progress through life, by which it is gradually raised, from sense and appetite, to intellect and virtue; but the process is broken off in the midst, and the materials are cast aside, before the grand experiment is complete. Allow the supposition of a future life, and every perplexity is unravelled: every difficulty is solved: all is wise, and right, and as it ought to be. The prescient powers of man have a dignified and important use. The pains of death, like all others, have their appropriate design. And the sovereign Artist will, in due time, collect his scattered materials, resume the process, and complete the work, in new and more favourable circumstances. Hence, I am inclined to indulge a joyful and animating hope.
But, my feelings are checked, and my convictions staggered, by another set of appearances, which lead to a conclusion directly the reverse. If there be a future life, there \textit{must} be a resurrection of the dead; for, no well-informed observer of the phænomena of human nature can believe, that the soul is capable of perception and activity in a state of separation from the body. To maintain this, would be to maintain a doctrine contradicted by reason, by analogy, and by uniform and universal experience. But what proof do the light of nature and the appearances of things afford, that such an event as a resurrection from the dead is probable, or, even possible? What principle of vitality is there in the human frame, after it has been once dissolved? Who is to collect the scattered particles? What memorable example has ever occurred in the revolution of ages? What analogies can make it probable? — Experience is silent. — Philosophy is confounded. — Revelation alone, darts a beam of light through the solid gloom. The messenger of heavenly truth
explicitly announces, that all who are in their graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth. He demonstrates his divine legation by miracle and prophecy. And he exemplifies his doctrine by his own resurrection from the grave. Thus we learn the inestimable value of the Christian revelation, and how admirably it supplies the deficiency of reason and philosophy. Reject Christianity, and you reject all rational hope of a future existence. Receive it, and no rational doubt can remain: no cloud of uncertainty any longer hovers upon a subject the most interesting to the human heart; the most necessary to the encouragement of virtue, and to the right discipline of the mind.

If then you desire to be truly and permanently happy, you will not rest satisfied with being Christians by education and prejudice, but you will be solicitous to examine, and to become familiar with the evidences of the Christian religion, that your faith and hope may rest upon an immoveable foundation.
III. Having thus obtained satisfactory information concerning the existence and character of God, and the future expectations of man, your last inquiry will be concerning the rule of life; or, what are the most efficacious means of obtaining the divine favour, and of ensuring happiness here and hereafter.

For the solution of this question you must learn in what true happiness consists, and by what means those habits and affections are to be generated and confirmed, which will most essentially contribute to the acquisition of this inestimable prize, and how the contrary affections and habits are to be corrected and subdued.

In what true happiness consists you will learn, from considering the constitution of human nature, from experience and observation, from the testimony of wise and virtuous friends, from the reasonings of those who have made these subjects the theme of long and profound investigation, from the practice of the wise and good in
all ages, and above all from the example of Christ, and the study of the sacred scriptures. These are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, and are able to furnish the humble inquirer for every good work. And this is the clear, the beautiful, the comprehensive precept, which they inculcate, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy understanding, and with all thy strength: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

It will be further necessary to inquire by what means these affections and habits are to be generated and cherished, which are essential qualifications for ultimate happiness. They are not innate. Character is the combination of habits; and habit is the necessary result of external circumstances and impressions, of mental discipline, and of voluntary re-iterated action. Love to God, benevolence to man, and the strict discipline of the heart, constitute the essentials of virtuous character. These habits
and affections are as certainly acquired by proper discipline, as art and science are the effect of study and practice. Happy they, who in early life, direct their serious and steady attention to this great concern. Their virtuous efforts shall not be in vain. It is the solemn declaration of celestial wisdom, and the promise has never failed, and never shall: "I love those who love me, and they who seek me early shall find me."

THE END.
Lately published by the Author,

AND MAY BE HAD OF

J. JOHNSON,

IN

ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD.

1. ELEMENTS of the DOCTRINE of the HUMAN MIND and of MORAL PHILOSOPHY. Price 9s. in boards.


4. The RIGHT and DUTY of UNITARIAN CHRISTIANS to form SEPARATE SOCIETIES for RELIGIOUS WORSHIP. A Sermon Preached at Birmingham, July 22, 1802, at the Opening of the New Meeting-House in the room of that in which Dr. Priestley formerly officiated, and which was destroyed in the Riot, July 14, 1791. Price 1s.

5. ZEAL and FORTITUDE in the CHRISTIAN MINISTRY ILLUSTRATED and EXEMPLIFIED. A Discourse delivered at Hackney, April 8, 1804, on occasion of the Death of the Reverend Joseph Priestley, LL.D. F.R.S. Price 1s.
6. The PROGRESS of ERROR concerning the PERSON of CHRIST represented; in a Sermon delivered at the Unitarian Chapel, in Essex-street, March 31, 1805. Price 1s.

7. The IMPORTANCE of RIGHT SENTIMENTS concerning the PERSON of CHRIST. Preached before the London Unitarian Society, April 10, 1806. Price 1s.

8. The PROVIDENCE of GOD over-ruling the ISSUES of WAR and CONQUEST. A Sermon preached on February 25, 1807, being the Day appointed for a GENERAL FAST.

9. LETTERS upon ARIANISM and other Topics of METAPHYSICS and THEOLOGY, in Reply to the Lectures of the Rev. B. Carpenter. Price 4s.

10. A SERMON occasioned by the DEATH of the Rev. THEOPHILUS LINDSEY, preached at Essex Chapel November 13, 1808. To which is added, A brief BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIR. Price 2s.