

esting one. He must feel in reference to its claims, not as he would in reference to the claims of a mere stranger, far less of one whom he knows to be a fool, and suspects to be a knave, but as he would in reference to the claims, of a person of whose wisdom and worth he had reason to think highly. The claims are of such a kind, and the consequences of admitting them are so momentous, that even, with all these favourable presumptions, they are not to be admitted without satisfactory evidence ; but they obviously deserve to be examined, and respectfully and diligently examined.

But this is not all. A person in a great measure ignorant of what true christianity is, as a moral as well as a doctrinal system, may, without much difficulty, be persuaded by an ingenious sceptic or unbeliever, that that religion, like so many others, has originated in imposture or delusion, or in a mixture of both. It is to ignorance of Christianity, as its principle *intellectual* cause, that we are disposed to trace the fearfully extensive success of infidel philosophy among the nominal Christians of the continent of Europe in the period immediately preceding the French Revolution. But on a person well informed as to the moral part of Christianity, all such ingenious sophistry will be thrown away. He is in possession of information which satisfies him that all those hypotheses, on one or other of which the denial of the truth and divinity of Christianity must proceed, are altogether untenable. There is a character of uniform, sober, practical good sense, belonging to the morality of the New Testament, which makes it one of the most improbable of all things, that its writers should have been the dupes either of their own imagination or of a designing impostor : and there is a sustained and apparently altogether unassumed and natural air of simplicity and godly sincerity, which forbids us, except on the most satisfactory evidence, to admit they who wore it were other than what they seemed to be, honest men. To the question. Were the men who delivered these moral maxims, fools or knaves, or a mixture of both ? Were they stupid dupes or wicked impostors ? the only reasonable answer is, the thing is barely possible, it is in the very highest degree improbable. Evidence tenfold more strong than infidel philosophy has ever dreamed of would be necessary to give any thing like verisimilitude to any of these hypotheses, on one or other of which must be built the disproof of the claims of Christianity on the attention, and faith, and obedience of mankind.

There is still another aspect in which the morality of Christianity may be considered, in reference to the evidence of the Divine origin of that religion. Viewed in all its bearings, it seems to be of the nature of a moral miracle. Compare the morality of the New Testament with the morality of ancient philosophy ; compare Jesus with Socrates ; and Paul, and Peter, and James, and John, with Epictetus or Plato, or Seneca, or Marcus Antoninus. The difference is prodigious ; the superiority is immeasurable. Now, how are we to account for this difference, this superiority ? On the supposition that the writers of the New Testament were uninspired men, we apprehend it is utterly unaccountable. Nothing but the admission,