

rare endowments of nature, prostituted their talents to low and worthless themes, labouring to decorate vice with the charms of poetry, or to recommend a bad cause by the persuasions of a subtle and artful eloquence. Even where the authors were good men, who were animated by the virtuous and benevolent purpose of promoting the benefit and improvement of mankind, as they were still open to error and mistakes, their authority cannot be implicitly followed, nor their judgment relied on as an ample and sufficient ground for our confidence and belief. But the author of the Scriptures was not a man, who, however wise and well-informed, was liable to err, and, however benevolent, might undesignedly mislead; but He was God, who, as He has seen and known all things from the beginning, must be intimately acquainted with all truth; and who, acting ever under the guidance of the purest benevolence, and the most unerring wisdom, can never deceive in any of His statements. It is true, that those through whose immediate instrumentality the Scriptures were written and given to the world, were though good, yet imperfect and fallible men; but they were not left to follow the guidance of their own independent judgment, either in the choice of the matter they introduced, or in the expressions with which they clothed it. All Scripture was given by inspiration; and "prophecy" says Peter, "came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." In this view,—the divinely furnished qualifications of its penmen,—the Scriptures possess a marked and exclusive superiority to all other books; and then the matter they contain is no less transcendent in importance, as it relates not to any ephemeral subjects, but such as are of lasting and universal interest to men,—the concerns of the soul, and an eternal world; they inform us of our original destiny, and instruct us in the art of living well, and dying happily. In the perusal of other books, we must proceed with caution, and exercise our faculties, not only to ascertain the meaning, but to judge of the truth and rectitude of the author's sentiments. But we can open the Scriptures with unhesitating confidence, and read their contents with a full and certain persuasion, both of the high importance, and the infallible certainty of every narrative they give, every doctrine they teach, and every precept they inculcate. It is God that speaks to us in this book; and though pages written in the language, and traced by the pen of frail mortals like ourselves, it bears the Divine impress, and carries a Divine authority, as plainly as if the words were heard pronounced from the throne of heaven.

Moreover, the Scriptures are valuable not only from their being the best, but also the oldest book in the world. The intrinsic interest and importance of their contents is, of course, what should most stamp them. But

this value is greatly increased when associated with the circumstances of their venerable antiquity. The whole volume of the Scriptures was not given to the Church at once in that complete form in which it is our great privilege to enjoy it. God spake at sundry times, as well as in divers portions, unto the fathers by the prophets; and although the Scriptures maintain throughout the same tone and reveal the same scheme of salvation, yet a period of not less than sixteen hundred years intervened between the time that God first spake by Moses, and the Spirit concluded the sacred volume by the revelations made to John in the isle of Patmos. Very few books are now extant which are as old even as the New Testament;—the greater portion of the works of the learned in classical antiquity having long since fallen a prey to the wasting hand of time, and the memory, as well as the names of their authors, being lost in the gulf of oblivion. But if we go to the earlier part of the Bible, there is no book so old, by several hundred years as the historical writings of Moses or the book of Job. Nor does this great age, which gives an antiquated air to all things else, in the least degree detract from the character, or lessen the value of the Scriptures. Its Divine authority is the same as ever. Its communications are as important and as necessary to be believed, as they were by the people who were first delighted and honoured by the precious boon. And, moreover, the belief of them is equally calculated to enlighten the understandings, to comfort the hearts, and to regulate the lives of men. On all these accounts, the sacred volume is entitled to a pre-eminent place in the estimation of Christians. And if we are accustomed to prize as a great and precious curiosity, a book which dates back a few hundred years only, much more should we set a high value on the book which possesses the exclusive honour of being the oldest in the world, especially when, in other respects, the eternal magnitude and interest of its discoveries stamp it as an incomparable treasure.

I proceed to remark, in the second place, that the comparison made in the text indicates the high measure of value to be set upon the Scriptures: "More to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold!" The object here brought into comparison with the Scriptures is gold, which, more than anything else, has been ever held in the highest estimation amongst men. It is the most precious of metals; and, moreover, is distinguished by various properties, which give it a superiority to all other substances in nature. Its colour is of a dazzling brightness, and exhibits so splendid and rich an appearance, that it is always applied to give the finishing polish to whatever is designed to be grand or sumptuous,—used by women for ornaments to the hands and the head; for a chain to the neck of a ruler; for a crown to the brow of a king; as well as enlisted in a variety of ways to gild