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"WISDOM IS THE PRINCIPAL THING; THEREFORE GET WISDOM."

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Chrology.

CAUSES AND WEAPONS OF INFIDELITY.

The first source of infidelity is the corruption of the heart, the weakness of the understanding as only the second. The silence which infidels in general observe, respecting the direct and positive proof of Christianity, is a sufficient evidence that they are aware of its strength. They cannot but know that works exist, containing, in a very moderate compass, the essence of the argument for Christianity, by relating which, or even by invalidating which, they would be held as the oracles of the world. Yet they decline the trial, not from any diffidence certainly in their own abilities, but from a secret, though deep seated consciousness, that the arguments for Christianity are invincible. Christians are always ready to meet them in the open field, but they refuse the main combat, and betake themselves to a petty and hugging warfare of detail. They shrink from the face of the direct evidence of Christianity, and spend their time in raising objections to its doctrines. Thus, it is evident, that if infidels neglect the proof of Christianity, contained in the writings of Paley and other standard authors, it is not that the arguments are too weak to engage their attention, but that they are too strong, and that if they were more easily refuted, they would be more frequently studied. It is the heart that first forsakes revelation; the head only follows its lead. The purity of Christianity is still more opposed to the lives of infidels, than the doctrines of Christianity are to their understandings.

The second source of infidelity is the narrowness of the human understanding, united to the presumption which naturally proceeds from contracted views, for the less any one knows, the more disposed he is to draw bold and sweeping inferences from his own narrow field of information. There is a necessary difference between the views of the finite, and the infinite understanding. "My thoughts are not as your thoughts," says God. The vision, which at a glance takes the whole of immensity, and the vision which is confined to a mere point, of course, cannot form the same representation of existence. If our narrow and limited mind constitutes itself the judge of the revelation which God has vouchsafed to give us, whether of his own character or of our future destiny, error must unavoidably result from all our reasonings and inquiries. Whether we seek to modify revelation to our own comprehension, with rational doubts, or reject it altogether as utterly incomprehensible, with the philosophic infidel, we carry along with us a principle of endless wandering from the truth, which will only bewilder us the more, the more closely we reason upon it, and precipitate us into a mistake to mistake till we lose the last glimmer of light, and reach the confines of utter darkness. Infidelity has no facts or principles to rest upon; like the reveries of ancient philosophy, it has nothing but *a priori* reasonings to support it, objections drawn from ignorance, and arguments borrowed from preconceived opinions and prejudices. But Christianity, like inductive philosophy, is established wholly upon facts and experience, it appeals to no principles but those which are in every day operation, and it rests upon the same evidence as all the other useful knowledge which we possess; and, if there be any difference, it is merely this, that the evidence for Christianity has been more strongly objected to, examined, and proved, than any other evidence whatsoever.

The third source of infidelity is the imperfection of our knowledge, which in its best estate, is progressive, but never full and perfect. It is evidently the intention of Providence, that society should be advancing in knowledge; that one generation should outstrip another, and that mankind

are never to rest in any present attainment, but are ever to be pressing forward to some future discovery. Thus the human faculties have scope for perpetual activity, and none are precluded from exertion by the labours and success of former generations. But it is evident by the constitution of the moral world, that no age enjoys exactly the same degree of information as another, the system of science which is fitted for one period, is unfitted for a succeeding one, and the form of knowledge is ever changing, because continually expanding.

This condition of society precludes religion from giving either a perfect or imperfect disclosure of science. A full revelation of science would be unintelligible to the persons to whom it was immediately addressed, and would supersede, as soon as it was understood, the natural use of our faculties. An imperfect revelation of science could only be fitted to the circumstances of the generation to which it was first communicated, while its partial discoveries would appear like antiquated errors to the succeeding ages, which were ascending to higher eminences of truth. Thus while human science is in its nature progressive and changing, and revelation is absolute and determined; while the one is intended as the exercise of our faculties, and the other as the assistant of our weakness, it is necessary that each be kept distinct from the other, and that religion should employ the universal and permanent language of natural appearances, and not the mutable phrasology of scientific theories.

When religion therefore describes the creation, it describes it as it is pictured to the eye of sense, not as it is conceived by the changing systems of philosophy. The expressions of the Bible are thus equally intelligible to man in every period of time, provided they do not perplex the intellect by endeavouring to accommodate the terms of scripture to their own theories. This difference, however, between science and revelation, is perhaps the greatest source of infidel objections. While the rude systems of early astronomy were conformable to the appearance of the heavens, the language of the Bible and of science was nearly the same, but the language of Copernicus, which was conformable to the real, and not the apparent movement of the heavens, sounded harsh to many who looked for philosophic accuracy, instead of universal intelligibility, as the characteristic of the language of divine inspiration. Hence many divines opposed the system of Copernicus, and many infidels adopted it, for the same reason, that it was supposed to be unimpeachable to the Bible. How much zeal on both sides was expended in idle discussion, while all will now allow, that the sun may rise and set in popular and scriptural language, without any question of the fact that he remains for ever in the centre of his system! It is greatly to be lamented that any pretended defenders of Christianity should be ignorant of this popular use of language in the Scriptures; it is they who give its venom to the opposition of infidelity. The Bible may easily be detested from the open attacks of its enemies, but not so easily from the fallacious support of its mistaken friends. It would be well that all divines had upon similar subjects the observation of Calvin ever present with them.—"Moses populariter scripsit, non potius respectu quam sidera."

Geology, in our times, has revived the same disputes that astronomy excited in former times, and from the same cause. Geology has discovered new worlds upon our earth, as astronomy revealed new worlds beyond our earth, and the bounds of time are as much enlarged by geology, as the bounds of space were by astronomy. Many of the facts of geology were brought forward by men who expected by them to

have overturned the authority of Moses, and several writers who came forward, as they would have it, in favour of revelation, instead of showing that those facts are not incompatible with the inspiration of Genesis, have thought it the easiest method loudly to deny them. A lover of truth will join neither party. Without doubting the facts of geology, he will not less doubt the infidelity of Christianity. Finding evidence for both, he will admit the truth of both. If they should appear incompatible with each other, he will attribute that appearance to the scantiness of his information; he will not reject the one or the other on that account, but will earnestly seek, and patiently wait for additional information, certain in his own mind that truth must ever be harmonious, and at unity with itself. In this case, however, the difficulty is not great, the same explanation which served to reconcile the account of Moses with the philosophy of Copernicus, will equally reconcile it with the discoveries of geology. The first verse of Genesis which, as we have before observed, carries along with it the stamp of its own divine origin, refers to the original creation of the heavens and the earth. The second verse refers to a subsequent state of chaos and disorder, without marking the interval, or the occurrences which had taken place between that ruined state of the earth, and the first creation of the world. Thus an interval in time is passed over unnoticed, as an interval in space is disregarded in the mention made by Moses of the stars. The new formation of the earth, is alone insisted upon, and its preparation for the abode of man. But we may observe in the new formation of the present earth, a striking analogy to what geology unfolds respecting former worlds, and we see that objections only arise from the imperfection of our knowledge, and disappear on its progressive advancement, and that the difficulties which arise from a narrow view of things are changed into arguments and proofs, whenever information becomes more complete, and whenever our survey is extended upon all sides.

While the proofs for Christianity are ever the same, admitting of no change, but of a perpetual addition, the objections of infidels are ever varying. The first writings against Christianity are totally different from those of later authors. The positions of Celsius and Porphyry are no longer tenable in our days, while the philosophy assumed by later infidels, and their mode of reasoning, would have been treated with contempt by the earlier antagonists of Christianity; but it is less surprising that infidels differ from each other, since they differ no less from themselves. The opinions which they maintain at one moment, they reject the next. They extend in one passage the authority of reason, and its power to judge of all things that pertain either to this world or to the next; in another sentence or word they depreciate its value as much below its real worth as they formerly exalted it, and pronounce it totally incapable of ever reaching the sure discovery of truth. Sometimes they plead with apparent zeal for the being of a God, and contend that his existence is so clearly discernible, that a man must be deprived of reason, if he does not discern the legible traces of a Deity in the works of creation; shortly afterwards they are in utter doubt and darkness, unable to pronounce whether a Deity exists or not; then they are equally confident on the opposite side, that the notion of a Deity is a mere chimera, for which no resemblance exists in the reality of things. Now, they contend for the eternal and unchangeable obligations of morality, and now they maintain that morality is only a useful fiction, invented for the benefit of society, and has no other existence than what it derives from human institutions and laws. In short, infidelity is like the region of the shadow of death described by Job, "Even a land of darkness, and the shadow of death, a land of darkness as darkness

is, and of the shadow of death, and whose light is as darkness." Infidelity is only constant to one principle, the enjoyment of the present time undisturbed by the future, for, as the Arabian Caliph expressed it, "How happy we are if a shadow would but be on, as Diderot has expressed it, less poetically, but not less rationally, "On se voit assez bien dans le monde, si l'on n'avait rien à craindre dans l'autre." Christianity never changes, but has added the same evidence from Design to Paley. That evidence never varies, though it continually increases, and it presents the same facts and evidence to all succeeding inquirers, though, with a conviction that it is ever deepening and with a variety that is receiving continual additions. If the objections for Christianity are so varied and excellent, they are not without their obligations to the ingenuity of infidel writers. In fact, Skeptics have done much more to support Christianity, than infidelity. Their arguments in favour of their own side of the question, are soon cast away and forgotten; but the works they call forth in answer to their attacks upon religion, remain long after the temporary controversy which gave them birth, and continue to minister to the edification of Christians, who may never have heard of the opponents to whom they were indebted for so clear a display of divine truth. Thus, in the scheme of divine government, evil is fleeting, but good is permanent; errors are ever arising and falling in endless succession, but the truths which are opposed to those errors, shine with endless and undecaying lustre, like the lights of Heaven, when the clouds that for a moment obscure them are broken, and altogether dissolved. All the best works on Christianity are owing to the attacks of infidels; we are indebted to Celsius for the defence of Origin, and to the prevalent infidelity of the day for the immortal work of Paley.—James Douglas, Esq.

DIVINE MYSTERIES.

Let not, then, my Christian Brethren, the charge of "mystery," or the cant proverb, that "where mystery begins, faith and religion end," in the least move you. That mystery should be readily allowed to exist every where in God's Creation, and in God's Providence, and at the same time be unaccountably rejected from God's Revelations, is indeed more than strange! That creatures who acknowledge that the nature of God is infinitely unlike, and infinitely above, that of any other being in the universe, and that their own share of reason is so small that they can scarcely think or speak intelligibly about it, or so much as define their own faculties of reasoning, should yet refuse to believe any thing of Jehovah which does not accord with human notions, is, surely, as weak and irrational as it is presumptuous. But that creatures who confess themselves to be miserable sinners, lying at the footstool of mercy, and standing in need of a revelation from God, to teach them, what they could not otherwise know, concerning his perfections, and the way of acceptance with him, should yet, when they acknowledge that such a Revelation has been given, undertake to sit in judgment upon it, and to reject such parts of it as are above the grasp of their disordered and diseased reason; argues a degree of daring and insatiable impiety, which, if it were not so common, we should be ready to say could not exist. Wherein does it essentially differ from that temper by which "angels became apostate spirits!"—Rev. S. Miller, D. D.

THE PROPHECY OF JOB.

How wonderful was the prophetic dispensation! What wonderful men were these prophets of the Most High! We should be happy enough in this world, if we had nothing to fear in the other.