

RELIGIOUS TRUTH.

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"But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest; for, as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against. Acts xxviii: 22."

After the apostle Paul had been successively examined before Felix, Festus and Agrippa; and by his appeal to the judgment seat of Caesar, had been conveyed to Rome for the purpose of meeting his trial: he called the chief of the Roman Jews together, to inform them the reason why he was there a prisoner, bound with a chain, and why he had appealed unto Caesar.

This subject having been explained to them, the Roman Jews returned for answer, "We neither received letters out of Judea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren, that came, showed or spake any harm of thee. But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for, as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against." They candidly admitted that they knew no harm of the apostle, nor that any serious matter was laid to his charge. But the sect of the Nazarene Reformer, they perfectly understood was most violently opposed—the Saviour was called a "glutton and a wine-biber; a friend of publicans and sinners;" an enemy to the law of Moses and the government of Caesar, as one possessed of a demon; and one who declared the most obvious untruths. With this knowledge, the Roman Jews, in a candor and justness of procedure which is not often exhibited in modern times, even by pretended followers of the Saviour, desired to hear from the apostle's own lips, what were the principles of the faith thus opposed and villified by its unbelievers.—They therefore appointed a day for this purpose; on which they met the apostle at his lodgings, where "he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses and out of the prophets, from morning until evening." The effect of the very proper conduct on their part, and the judicious instruction of the apostle, is said to be as follows, "and some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not."

In applying this instruction to present circumstances, I shall consider that my readers are aware that the sect attached to the Restitution, is "every where spoken against." For the fact needs no proof, that the Restitution is denominated a licentious doctrine and a doctrine of satan, by those who are ignorant of it—while its believers are represented, even by men who profess to be charitable and Christian teachers, as a graceless, godless and vicious people. The most revolting and untrue descriptions are given of the doctrine, in churches, and especially during protracted meetings; so that persons, hearing such untrue descriptions, can obtain no just notions of it; for, as the doctrine of the Saviour was represented as of evil when it was of good, so this is represented as of satan when it is of divine origin.

These facts being known to my readers, I shall consider them as instituting the inquiry concerning the Restitution, "but we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest; for, as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against." I shall

assume as truth, that there exists a *liberality*, in a portion of community at least, which is desirous of meeting and understanding this doctrine, before it is condemned. I shall therefore expect attention, while I show what are the leading Scriptural truths to which this despised sect gives assent. We shall not attempt to develop the minutiae of faith, because there are hardly two individuals in any sect, who believe exactly alike in regard to some *minor things*—and as it is one of the cardinal principles of Christianity to let every person have perfect freedom in differing from others, should his reason and conscience dictate such difference, so we shall attempt to regulate private and small matters of faith. We shall only exhibit the great and uniform points of Scripture doctrine, which give character to the believers of the Restitution as a sect differing from all other sects. And, in effecting this object, it will not be expected that an elaborate proof of each point of faith will be given, because such a work would manifestly be impossible in the limits to which I have confined myself.

I. In looking abroad among the sublime objects to us visible in the universe, we hear in the infinite variety of material forms, in the wise and complex mechanism of animal life, in the amazing size, the wonderful revolutions, the unchanging harmony, and the grand array of heavenly bodies; a voice of reason, of divinity and of philosophy, uttering with its own peculiar eloquence,

"The hand that made us; is divine."

The dissection of the most common forms of animal or vegetable life, proves to demonstration that Supreme Intelligence reigns over, in and through all nature.—For, in the light of this great truth, all other views which attempt to account for the origin of the universe, are feeble and unproved. If an individual should inform us that a beautiful music-box which he held in his hand, was produced by chance or by certain blind laws growing out of unintelligent matter—that no intelligence superior to, and separate from, the materials composing this box, had an agency in forming, fitting and arranging its various parts, which, when united, gave forth the beautiful music we hear—no person would believe such statements. Because it is a demonstrated fact, that there must have been existing intelligence to procure the different metals composing the box, to mould them into the necessary shapes, and to so nicely adjust every part, as to warble out the desired melody and its accompaniments. Is this fact less true in regard to the complicated works discoverable in nature? Can chance, or blind laws, or unintelligent matter, produce material forms, which, in nicety of arrangement, in utility of purpose, in beauty of order, and in wisdom of creation, are as much superior to a music-box as the sun is greater than a grain of sand?—It is therefore evident that Intelligence of the highest order and of infinite capabilities exists *above*, and as sovereign Creator, reigns over all nature.

Hence rejecting the doctrine of atheism in all its forms, we believe that there is one, only living and true God—who is "without beginning of days or ending of years," ever-existent, eternal, undying, the great "Master of all life"—who "created

the heavens and the earth," and all things therein—who is the Father of all creatures, their Originator and Preserver, satisfying all their rational desires, and surrounding them with continuous tokens of his benignant Providence—who holds the reins of supreme government in the universe, working "all things after the counsel of his own will," and with unerring certainty bringing all things to a good end, because disappointed by no circumstance—who is infinite in wisdom, boundless in power, over-consistent and unwavering in justice, illimitable in goodness, and unbounded in mercy—whose united attributes form the grand characteristic, the universal magnet, and the name and nature of Deity, LOVE; the Benevolence which is displayed in, and diffused among all the works of creation.

The fact, then, that there is a God, is the foundation of our faith, and the Fountain from whence flows that divine and efficient grace in which we find a guaranty of the ultimate triumph of truth and virtue over error and sin.

II. Whoever considers the history of past pagan nations, and studies their situation as they at present exist; who remembers their idolatries, their sacrifices of human life to imaginary and vindictive gods, and their constant and manifold errors, must we think, admit the necessity of divine revelation or of an immediate communication of the great principles of truth from God to man. This fact is admitted by some of the wisest men that have ever graced the pagan world.

And when we take into consideration the antiquity of the books which we designate by the name "Bible," the oldest of which books can be traced for thirty-three centuries back to Moses—when we consider the prophecies therein recorded, most of which have been wonderfully and minutely fulfilled centuries after they were written, and whose truth is recorded in the ruins of Ninevah, Tyre, Babylon, Jerusalem, and the past and present condition of the Jews—when we consider the miracles therein recorded, which could alone be effected by the power of God, and yet whose performance is attested by the most creditable witnesses, and which were not denied by Celsus, Porphyry or Julian deists of the second, third or fourth centuries—when we consider the moral purity and excellence of those whose writings compose the Bible, as well as the life, and death, and character of Christ, whose existence and crucifixion are matters of unquestioned history—when we consider what superiority of civilization, of institutions, of advance in knowledge, and of increase in virtue, Christianity has given to the nations who have cherished it—when we consider how the truth of the Christian covenant has reformed the vicious, instructed the ignorant, given hope to the despairing, consolation to the mourning, and songs of triumph and victory to the dying—we are constrained to admit, that in the Bible, God has spoken to the children of men.

Therefore, rejecting the doctrine of skepticism, we believe that the Bible contains a Divine revelation from God to men, making known the character, will, purposes, plans, and designs of Deity—that this revelation is the "man of our counsel," the source of moral wisdom, the

fountain of Christian truth and virtue—that it is infinitely superior to all creeds and creed-books, and that the Christian should go to it as his only creed-book—that it is the perfect guide of man for belief and for practice, and that it is the rule of decision by which to arrive at Christian truth. By these remarks, it is seen that to faith in the existence of the only living and true God, we add faith in the Bible, as containing a revelation from heaven to the inhabitants of the earth.

III. The individual who peruses the Old Testament carefully will find a personage prophesied of who was to be the Messiah, the Root of David, the Branch the elect Servant of God—who was to set judgment in the earth, though he was rejected by his people and led like a lamb to the slaughter. If that individual will also peruse the New Testament carefully, he will find a personage spoken of, "called the beloved Son of God," the man "Christ Jesus," whose life, actions and fate, were the exact fulfilment of the prophecies found in the Old Testament concerning him.—This personage presents a character of spotless purity, of ennobling virtue, of earnest compassion for the ignorant and sinful, of untiring energy for the welfare of the world, of unswerving confidence in the Father who sent him, of unshaken courage in facing persecution and yet mingled with the most sincere forgiveness of his foes. He declared noble doctrine, and in proof of his divine mission, performed miracles of surprising character. These, and other facts recorded in the New Testament, will convince the reflecting that the Messiah is of divine origin, sent among men as the "Saviour of the world," as the Redeemer of man.

Therefore, rejecting unequivocally the doctrine of the trinity, we most cordially believe that Jesus is the Son of God, sent forth by Deity on a divine mission of truth and grace—we believe that he was an individual chosen by heaven for a special purpose, was endued with power from on high, which enabled him to perform miracles, to foretell future events, to read the thoughts of men, and to establish Christianity—that he has "all power in heaven and on earth" in regard to the moral interests of the human family—that he was without sin, and was the "express image" of God's moral person—that he was the well-beloved to "bring life and immortality to light"—that he will rule and reign in the kingdom of Christian truth, until, having subdued all things to himself, he will deliver up the kingdom to God the Father, that he, God, may be all in all. And we perfectly agree with the apostle, when he said, "for there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." 1 Tim. ii: 5, 6.

IV. Wherever men can be found—in whatever age or clime they may have lived—however degraded and ignorant they may have been, or are now—to whatever nation or tribe they may have belonged, or do now belong—no person exists, but that has hopes of life beyond the grave.—This hope or desire is as universal as the race of Adam, and as prevalent in the soul as hunger is in the body. And certainly no nation or tribe has yet been discovered, which is without a religion embracing