

quary as a magistrate, had sealed up his despatch for Rome—his public duty was now done, and he felt no further inclination to think of a religion propagated by a few wanderers and Jews.

If the two letters between Pliny and the Emperor had been lost, would it not have been argued that Christianity was too obscure to attract notice, or that it had not existed? Tacitus calls Christianity a pernicious superstition—*exitiabilis superstitio*—and this completes his description: this is evidence that he had made no inquiry into the religion. No sceptic of the present age would apply this epithet, however he might deny the divine origin of revelation. It is obvious, that Tacitus took the idle report of the day in Rome, whose paganism began already to feel alarm at the religion which declared a determined war against idolatry. If he had inquired, he must have met with the letters which St. Paul had, but a few years before the period of which he speaks, been sending to all the churches as their general rule of conduct. The mind of a man like Tacitus must have honored principles like these—“Rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Mind not high things; but condescend to men of low estate. Recompense to no man evil for evil; provide things honest in the sight of all men. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. Owe no man any thing, but to love one another; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. Knowing the time: that it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us, therefore, cast off the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light. Let us walk honestly as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.” It is not possible that, after seeing a

document of this order proceeding from the highest authority, and acknowledged as law in the infant church, he could have called Christianity a pernicious superstition. But we are to remember the infinite superiority of modern life in all that facilitates knowledge: the most uncivilized portion of Christian Europe has advantages in this respect immensely superior to the most civilized and opulent empire of all antiquity; and much of this may be owing to the influence of Christianity itself. Turkey divided from Christendom by an imperceptible physical bound, is divided from it by an immeasurable desert in the conveniences of social life: standing physically by the side of European society, she is morally flung back from it two thousand years, and stands beside ancient Rome. In our age, the rapidity of communication, the press, the habit of public discussion, the higher cultivation of the general mind, make knowledge rapid, easy, and secure. Where Tacitus wrote, there was no daily transmission of intelligence; no comment on its value perpetually soliciting the public eye; no implied necessity for the general acquaintance with a subject remote, religious, and which was not to be discussed in any public meeting of the legislature. There are at this hour a multitude of sects among ourselves, for whose tenets we must look into books. What conception could be faithful, that had no firmer assurance than the vagueness of conversation, or the exaggeration of common rumour? But when Pliny saw it on the spot, does he join in the brief and disdainful sentence of the Roman historian? We have already observed, that he examined as a magistrate simply to ascertain, whether the new doctrine tended to shake the allegiance of the provinces. His answer to the Emperor gives as the result, that he could discover nothing beyond their meeting together on a fixed day before day-light, when they sung a hymn to Christ as a God,