

## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS TO THE NARRATIVES OF MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE AND JOHN.

BY A. CAMPBELL.

THESE books were designed to be read and understood by persons of the humblest capacity, as well as by those of the most exalted genius! Readers of the most limited education, as well as those of the most liberal attainments, were equally embraced in the view of the writers. If particular attention was paid to any class of readers, it was doubtless to the poor, who have not the means of refined education. One of the most striking evidences of the divine mission of the Saviour was, that, *to the poor his glad tidings were announced*. A revelation not adapted to them, forfeits all claims to divine origin.

In laying down some general principles or rules for reading intelligibly the following narratives, regard must be had to all sorts of readers—the young as well as the old; the illiterate as well as the learned; and also some attention must be paid to the difficulties that lie in the way of a rational and profitable perusal of them.

In the first place, then, there is no opinion or notion which is more prejudicial to an intimate acquaintance with these writings, than that of the Egyptian priests, introduced into the first theological school at Alexandria, and carried throughout christendom—viz. “That the words of scripture have a mystical, spiritual, theological, or some other than a literal meaning; and that the same rules of interpretation are not to be applied to the inspired writings which are applied to human compositions,” than which no opinion is more absurd and pernicious. If this notion were correct, all efforts to understand this book must be in vain, until God sends us an interpreter who can resolve those enigmas and mystic words of theological import, and give us the plain meaning of what the Apostles and Evangelists wrote.

The reader will please consider that, when God spoke to man, he adopted the language of man. To the fathers of the Jewish nation he spoke in their mother tongue. By his Son, and his Son by the Apostles, spoke to every nation in its own language. When he spoke to any nation he uniformly adopted the words of that nation in expressing his will to it. And that he used their words in the commonly received sense, needs no other proof than this; that if he had not done so, instead of enlightening them in the knowledge of his will, he would have deceived and confounded them: than which no hypothesis is more impious. For example, were God to speak to us in *English*, and select from our vocabulary the words *death*, *punishment*, *perpetual*, and *wicked*; were he to use the last term as we use it, and annex to the others a signification different from that we affix to them—such as mean *life* by the term *death*, *happiness* by the term *punishment*, and a *limited time* by the word *perpetual*, and, without apprising us of such a change in their meaning, say, “*Perpetual death shall be the punishment of the wicked*,” what a deception would be practised upon us! His words in our acceptance, would convey a tremendous thought; but, in his reserved sense, would mean no more than, “*A limited life shall be the happiness of the wicked*.”

Once more on this topic. As nothing can be said to be revealed or