

THE CATECHISMS

OF THE

WESLEYAN METHODISTS:

COMPILED AND PUBLISHED BY ORDER OF

THE CONFERENCE,

FOR THE USE OF THE FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS
CONNECTED WITH THAT BODY.

No. III.

FOR THE USE OF YOUNG PERSONS.

ON THE EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY, AND THE
FRUTH OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

TORONTO:

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CHAPTER I.

DEFINITIONS AND EXPLANATIONS.

Youth. What is CHRISTIANITY?

Teacher. The doctrines, morals, and manner of worship taught by Christ and his apostles, and recorded in the New Testament.

Y. What is JUDAISM?

T. The religion and laws of the Jews, a people descended from Abraham. These are contained in the books of the Old Testament.

Y. What is the religion of the PATRIARCHS?

T. The belief and worship of the early progenitors of the different nations and families of men before the introduction of idolatry. The Patriarchs, eminently so called, lived before the giving of the law by Moses; and the most illustrious of these were Adam, Abel, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Job.

Y. What is meant by REVELATION?

T. A supernatural communication of truth from God to man, by which we are instructed in the will of God respecting us, both as to what we are to believe, and to do; how we are to worship him? what

we may hope from his mercy, or fear from his displeasure.

Y. Does God make revelations of his will to every man ?

T. Not immediate revelations. He revealed his will first to Adam ; then to Noah, and Abraham, and others among the Patriarchs ; to Moses and the Prophets ; and finally by Christ and his Apostles. We acknowledge no other revelations ? and these were intended, in different degrees, for the benefit of mankind at large.

Y. Have all these revelations been recorded ?

T. No : revelation is distinguished into ORAL and WRITTEN. The revelations which were made to the Patriarchs were transmitted by word of *mouth*, and *handed down* from one age to another. For this reason revelation among them is said to be *oral*, or *traditional* ; and the long duration of their lives preserved it from being corrupted. These original truths, doctrines, and traditional facts, were thus transmitted to Moses, who wrote them, and the laws which he received from God in the wilderness of Sinai, in the five books which bear his name, and are called the *Pentateuch*. The other books of the Old Testament, whether historical, poetical, or prophetic, were written by inspired men called *Prophets*, by the command of God, and compose the book called the *Old Testament*. Our Lord committed nothing to writing ; but his life and discourses were written after his resurrection by four of his disciples, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, who "brought all things to their remembrance. The book of the Acts of the Apostles, which contains an account of the first planting of Christianity in the world, was written by St. Luke ; the Epistles and the Revelation by different Apostles, all under the influence of the Holy Spirit. These collectively are denominated the

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New Testament; and the Old and the New Testaments we emphatically call the WORD OF GOD.

Y. Has this collection of divine revelations any other name?

T. Yes; it is also called THE BIBLE, which signifies THE BOOK, to denote its eminence and supreme excellence. The Christian religion is also called "THE GOSPEL," which signifies "*the good news.*" The Jewish religion is called "THE LAW," because of the commands, *moral, ceremonial, and Judicial*, which were given to the Jews by Moses.

Y. Is not the Bible sometimes called "the Old and New Testaments?"

T. Yes; because in them God enters into *covenant* with man, and engages to bestow certain blessings upon him of his own good pleasure. This covenant under the law was made specially with the Jews, but under the Gospel with both Jews and Gentiles. The former is for this, and for some other reasons, called THE OLD TESTAMENT, OR COVENANT; the latter THE New, and is perfect, universal, and shall never pass away.

Y. Pray explain another term often used,—DISPENSATION.

T. This word signifies a *dispensing or bestowing*: and, in the theological sense, means the truth and grace which have been dispensed in different periods of the world by successive revelations of the will and mercy of God to mankind. For this reason we say the *Patriarchal, the Mosaic or Jewish, and the Christian dispensations*:—the first commencing with Adam and reaching to the giving of the law by Moses; the second, from that event to the death of Christ; the third, from the death of Christ to the end of the world.

Y. All this I comprehend: but I would now be more fully instructed in the PROOFS that these dispensations are from God; in other words, how the

revelations contained in the Old and New Testaments can be shown to be of divine authority.

T. This is a laudable desire ; and we will proceed to these proofs step by step, that "you may know the certainty of the things whercin you have been instructed."

CHAPTER II.

A REVELATION FROM GOD HIGHLY PROBABLE AND NECESSARY.

T. LET our first inquiry be, whether it is probable that man has been left without a revelation of the will of God. I ask you, first, what is Moral Agency ?

Y. Agency is the *doing* of anything ; and Moral Agency is the doing of what is *good* or *evil*, right or wrong. These are called *moral acts*, in opposition to natural acts, as walking, flying, eating, &c., which, in themselves, are neither good nor evil, and incapable of being praised or blamed.

T. Why do you call some actions good or evil, and therefore praise or blame them ?

Y. Because they are agreeable or opposed to some rule or law, which determines their nature.

T. By this law do you mean the law of your own or any other country ?

Y. Certainly not ; for if all national laws were abolished, the actions which mankind have generally agreed to call good or evil would still be regarded as such, and be praised or blamed accordingly.

T. If there has been this general agreement among mankind, when did they agree to form those rules which make certain actions good or evil ?

Y. If they did so agree, it must have been at a very early period, even before the forming of mankind into states and nations ; for the laws of states are clearly built upon a previous agreement among men, that some actions are good and beneficial, and that

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others are evil and injurious, and ought to be restrained, as murder, theft, and other vices which affect society. But we have no record of any solemn discussion of so weighty a subject, or of any agreement among mankind to lay down rules or laws, which should first determine the good or evil of actions.

T. But is there no proof that mankind, in the earliest ages of the world, considered various actions as determined to be good and evil by a higher authority than that of MAN ?

Y. Yes, certainly : all antiquity agrees in making a distinction between things good and evil, and in representing one to be pleasing, and the other displeasing, to God ; one to be the object of reward, and the other of punishment ; and consequently, in acknowledging A WILL OR LAW OF GOD on these subjects. But what do you conclude from this ?

T. That all the evidence which arises from human history goes to establish this point,—that a rule was always known in the world by which men's actions were judged of as good or evil ; and that this rule was the will of God, which, in some mode, was ascertainable by his creatures.

Y. This seems to be indisputable.

T. Then this makes it highly probable that, in the earliest ages, God made an express revelation of his will to mankind ?

Y. This is also highly probable from the facts just now mentioned.

T. Let me then ask you, whether man is not a created being ?

Y. This is certain ; for he is born and changes, and dies, and is therefore dependent upon some power which he cannot resist.

T. Then there must have been a first pair from whom we all have descended ?

Y. This also is clear ; and as they could not

create themselves, they must have been immediately created by God.

T. Do you see nothing in the nature of man to distinguish him from other animals?

Y. Yes : I especially observe that he is capable of good and evil actions, which they are not ; that he is therefore a subject of reward and punishment ; that he is capable of reflecting with pleasure or dissatisfaction upon his actions, which faculty we call *conscience*.

T. Does not, then, the very nature which his Maker has given him bear an evident relation to *law* or *rule*, and to *reward* and *punishment* ?

Y. Most clearly ; and from this I see another strong presumption arise, that a creature, who by his Creator is in his very nature constituted to be capable of moral government, must, from the beginning of his existence, have been placed under a *moral law*.

T. But does not a moral law manifestly suppose a *revelation* ?

Y. Truly ; because law, being the will of a superior, must be *known* before it can be obligatory ; and it belongs to a legislator to *promulgate*, or, in other words, to *reveal* his laws.

T. But suppose it said, that man might *infer* the will of God from natural objects, and the course of divine government, without an express revelation, how would you reply ?

Y. I would say, 1. That then the will of God on moral subjects must have been more imperfectly known in the first age, than in the following ages of the world, because men had had less time for observing nature, and less experience of the course of Providence. But this is contrary to all history and all tradition. 2. That by inference they could only at best obtain *imperfect* intimations of the will of God. And, 3. That the will of God would thus be made to depend upon the *opinions* of men, that is upon the just-

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ness and fairness of their inferences, and would, therefore, be a different rule of action in different men; a conclusion which cannot be maintained by any sober person.

T. Your answer is forcible; but you may add, that if man had been left to infer the will of God from the works of nature, and the course of God's government of the world, without a *direct revelation*, there is nothing in either to indicate that God ought to be worshipped; that he will hear our prayers; that there is a state of future rewards and punishments; or that God will pardon those who have broken his laws, or how that pardon must be sought. On all these subjects, which are essential to *morality, religion, and hope*, the works of nature and the dispensation of Providence are totally silent: and thus there could have been no *system of complete and influential morality, and no authorized religious worship, and no hope beyond the grave, without an express revelation.*

Y. All this appears very manifest; and yet I hear much of the sufficiency of *human reason* to discover the being and perfections of God from his works, his will respecting us, the immortality of the soul, and other important subjects.

T. This is the constant theme of infidels; and yet do you not perceive that none of them have gained their knowledge of these truths from *reason*, but that they are all indebted for them to *revelation*?

Y. Certainly this is the case with the Deists of the present age; but how does that apply to the philosophers of Rome, Greece, Egypt, and other ancient countries?

T. Just as forcibly. Not any of the most enlightened of them, whose writings remain, or whose opinions we know, ever pretended to be the discoverers of these truths. They speak of them sometimes believingly, sometimes doubtfully, but always as

known in the world, and as derived from an earlier age of antiquity.

Y. You suppose, therefore, that these opinions were derived from a common source?

T. Undoubtedly they were transmitted from an earlier age: for

1. The wonderful agreement of even the superstitions of all Heathen nations, in recognizing certain facts of the Mosaic history, is a strong proof that they are but perversions of the religion and history of the patriarchal times. Plato, one of the wisest and most learned of the ancient Greek philosophers, says, "After a certain flood, which but few escaped, on the increase of mankind, they had neither letters, writing, nor laws, but obeyed the manners and institutions of their fathers as laws; and when colonies separated from them, they took an elder for their leader, and in their new settlements retained the customs of their ancestors, *those especially which related to their gods, and thus transmitted them to their posterity; they imprinted them on the minds of their sons, and they did the same to their children.* This was the origin of right laws, and of the different forms of government."

2. The practice of sacrifice, which may at once be traced into all nations and to the remotest antiquity, affords an eminent proof of the common origin of religion; inasmuch as no reason drawn from the nature of the rite itself, or the circumstances of men, can be given for the universality of the practice: and as it is clearly a positive institute, and opposed to the *interests of men*, it can only be accounted for by an *injunction*, issued at a very early period of the world, and solemnly imposed.

3. The events, and some of the leading opinions of the earliest ages, mentioned in Scripture, may also be traced among the most barbarous, as well as in the Oriental, the Grecian, and the Roman systems of

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mythology. Such are, the FORMATION OF THE WORLD; THE FALL AND CORRUPTION OF MAN; the hostility of a powerful and supernatural agent of wickedness under his appropriate and scriptural emblem, the SERPENT; THE DESTRUCTION OF THE WORLD BY WATER; the RE-PEOPLING OF IT BY THE SONS OF NOAH; the EXPECTATION OF ITS FINAL DESTRUCTION BY FIRE: and, above all, the *promise of a great and divine DELIVERER.*

4. All nations have dispersed from the patriarchal seats in Asia: this has often been satisfactorily proved. All religions, however superstitious, agree in a common origin. All the great masters of human reason in the ancient world, had, therefore, heard of God and his perfections; of moral distinctions; of man's immortality; and of a future state. The best of their notions were in the world long before they lived; the worst only, by which they corrupted the primitive truths, were of their own invention.

Y. I perceive, then, that human reason has no claim at all, even in these early ages, to the credit of these discoveries; but tell me how it is, that men who reject the Bible are so confident in ascribing so much power to their unaided reason.

T. My answer may, perhaps, surprise you; but I will prepare you for it by reminding you that the philosophers of antiquity made no such pretensions, and that this confidence in human reason is the boast only of men where Christianity is already known. The ancient sages confessed the weakness of their understanding, and their inability to discover truth. Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Cicero, and others, all confess their ignorance, and their doubts, on those very subjects which some of the moderns pretend to be clearly discoverable without a revelation; and the only reason which can be given why infidel philosophers of the present age speak with so much assurance as to their own ability to make better

discoveries, is, that these discoveries *have been actually made by the Bible*, and have become so familiar, and, being once revealed, carry so clear a conviction to the reason of man, that, in the pride and forgetfulness of their hearts, they think them so easy as to be quite within the reach of their own efforts, had they not been so assisted. For, as Mr. Locke truly observes, "when truths are once known to us, though by tradition, we are apt to be favorable to our own parts, and ascribe to our own understanding the discovery of what, in reality, we borrowed from others; or, at least, finding we can prove what at first we learned from others, we are forward to conclude it is an obvious truth, which, if we had sought, we could not have missed. Many are beholden to revelation who do not acknowledge it. It is no diminishing to revelation, that reason gives its suffrage too to the truths revelation has discovered: but it is our mistake to think, that because reason confirms them to us, we had the first certain knowledge of them from thence, and in that clear evidence we now possess them." The answer, then, to your question is that if we had had no revelation from God we should never have heard so much boasting of the strength of *reason* in man.

Y. But if the first and fundamental truths of religion were known in the early ages of the world, is it not a proof also of the weakness of man's reason, that he fell into so many and such ridiculous errors on religious subjects.

T. It is both a proof of the wickedness of his *heart*, and the weakness of his *reason*, and also of the necessity of a new and WRITTEN revelation being introduced, to restore, enlarge, and perpetuate religious knowledge: for the truth being once lost, no power of human reason was ever able to restore it; the whole world, both wise and barbarous nations, had sunk into the grossest ignorance at the time of the

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advent of our Lord ; and those parts of the world into which the light of our religion has not yet entered, even where civilization and learning exist, are in the same condition to this day.

Y. Be pleased to give me some instances of this.

T. It is not necessary to state particularly, what every one knows to be a fact, that the body of the people were in all nations grossly idolatrous and superstitious, ignorant of God and of moral distinctions, and crediting the most absurd fables, both as to the gods, and a future life. But the charge of great ignorance and error lies also against the wisest and most cultivated minds in the Pagan world ; for,

1. Though the belief of one Supreme Being has been found in many parts of the world, yet the notion of subordinate deities, the immediate dispensers of good and evil to men, and the objects of their fear and worship, has almost equally obtained ; and this, of necessity, destroyed or greatly counteracted the moral influence of that just opinion.

2. The modern idolatry of Hindostan, which in principle differs nothing from that of the ancient world, affords a striking comment upon this point, and indeed is of great importance in enabling us to conceive justly of the true character and practical effects of idolatry in all ages. One Supreme Being is acknowledged by the Hindoos ; but they never worship him, nor think that he concerns himself with human affairs at all. "This being," says Moore, "is called Brahm, one eternal mind, the self-existing, incomprehensible Spirit. To him, however, the Hindoos erect no altars. The objects of their adoration commence with the triad, *Brahma*, *Vishnu*, and *Seva*, which represent the almighty powers of creation, preservation, and destruction."

3. The learned among the classic Heathen, it is true, occasionally speak nobly concerning God and his attributes ; but at the same time they were led by

their own imaginations and reasonings to conclusions which neutralize the effect of their sublimer conceptions, and often contradict them. The eternity of matter, for instance, was held by the Greek and Roman philosophers, and by their preceptors, the Oriental schools, who thought it absolutely impossible that anything should be produced from nothing,—thus destroyed the notion of creation in its proper sense, and of a Supreme Creator.

In like manner, though occasionally we find many excellent things said of the providence of God, all these were weakened or destroyed by other opinions. The Epicurean sect denied the doctrine, and laid it down as a maxim, "That what was blessed and immortal gave neither any trouble to itself nor others;" a notion which exactly agrees with the system of the modern Hindoos. The Stoics contended for a Providence; but in their creed it was counteracted by the doctrine of an absolute necessity, or fate, to which God and matter, or the universe, which consists, as they thought, of both, was immutably subject; and where they allow it, they confine the care of the gods to great affairs only.

Another great principle of religion is the doctrine of a future state of reward and punishment; and though in some form it is recognised in Pagan systems, and the traditions of the primitive ages may be traced in their extravagant perversions and fables, its evidence was either greatly diminished, or it was mixed up with notions entirely subversive of the moral effect which it was originally intended to produce.

The doctrine of Aristotle and the Peripatetics gives no countenance to the opinion of the soul's immortality, or even of its existence after death. Democritus and his followers taught, that the soul is material and mortal;—Heraclitus, that when the soul is purified from moist vapours, it returns into

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the soul of the universe ; if not, it perishes ;—Epicurus and his followers, that “when death is, we are not.” The leading men among the Romans, when philosophy was introduced among them, followed the various Greek sects. Cicero doubted. Pliny declares that the soul and body have no more sense after death than before we were born ; Caesar, “that beyond death there is neither place for care nor joy.” The poets, it is true, spoke of a future state of rewards and punishments ; they had the joys of Elysium and the tortures of Tartarus ; but both philosophers and poets regarded them as vulgar fables.

Thus you see that “the world by wisdom knew not God ;” and that the very first principles of religion were, for ages, either denied, or corrupted by the most fatal errors.

Y. But as I have heard much of *Heathen virtue*, I suppose that the *morals* of Gentile nations were better than their opinions?

Z. This also is an error. The facts mentioned in their own histories, and by their own satirists and poets, show that morals were universally corrupted, to an extent not known amongst the worst Christian nations, and that the descriptions of the state of the Heathen world in the New Testament, and especially in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, contain no exaggerations.

1. The slight regard paid to the life of man in all heathen countries, cannot have escaped the notice of reflecting minds. Among the Romans, men were murdered in their very pastimes, by being made to fight with wild beasts and with each other ; and though this was sometimes condemned, yet the passion for blood increased, and no war ever caused so great a slaughter as did the gladiatorial combats. They were at first confined to the funerals of great persons. The first show of this kind exhibited in Rome by the Bruti, on the death of their father, con-

sisted of three couples; but afterwards the number greatly increased. Julius Cæsar presented 300 pairs of gladiators; and the Emperor Trajan, 10,000 of them, for the *entertainment* of the people. Sometimes these horrid exhibitions, when the practice has attained its height, deprived Europe of 20,000 lives in one month.

2. This is further illustrated by the treatment of slaves, which composed so large a portion of the population of ancient states. They knew and acknowledged the evil of murder, and had laws for its punishment; but to this despised class of human beings they did not extend the rule; nor was killing them accounted murder, any more than the killing of a beast. The master had absolute power of life, or death, or torture; and their lives were therefore sacrificed in the most wanton manner. The youth of Sparta made it their pastime frequently to lie in ambush by night for the slaves, and sally out with daggers upon every Helot who came near them, and murder him in cold blood. It was the custom of Vedius Pollio, a Roman, when his slaves had committed a fault, sometimes a very trifling one, to order them to be thrown into his fish-ponds, to feed his lampreys. It was the *constant custom*, as we learn from Tacitus, when a master was murdered in his own house, to put all the slaves to death indiscriminately.

3. In many heathen nations it was allowed to strangle, or drown, or expose INFANTS, especially if sickly or deformed; and that which in Christian states is considered as the most atrocious of crimes, was, by the most celebrated of ancient Pagan nations, esteemed a wise and political expedient to rid the state of useless or troublesome members, and was even enjoined by some of their most celebrated sages and legislators. The same practice continues to this day in a most affecting extent, not only among

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uncivilized Pagans, but among the Hindoos and the Chinese.

4. As far as the authority of their moral teachers went, a full scope was given for the indulgence of hatred, malice, and insatiate revenge. One of the qualities of the *good man* described by Cicero is, that he hurts no one, except he be injured himself; and he declares as to himself, "I will revenge all injuries, according as I am provoked by any." And Aristotle speaks of meekness as a defect, because the meek man will not avenge himself; and of *revenge*, as "a more *manly* thing."

5. To those vices which are connected with the pursuit of sinful pleasure, lawgivers, statesmen, philosophers, and moralists gave the sanction of their *opinions* and their *practice*; which foul blot of ancient Heathenism continues, to this day, to mark the morals of Pagan countries.

6. In most civilized states, the very existence of society and the natural selfishness of man led to the preservation of the ancient laws against THEFT and RAPINE, and to the due execution of the statutes made against them; but, in this also, we see the same disposition to corrupt the original prohibition. It was not extended to strangers, or to foreign countries; nor was it generally interpreted to reach to anything more than flagrant acts of violence. Usury, extortion, and fraud, were rather regarded as laudable acts than as injurious to character. Throughout India, there is said to be scarcely such a thing as common honesty.

7. DECEIT AND FALSEHOOD have been the character of all Pagan nations, and continue so to be to this day. This is the character of the Chinese as given by the best authorities; and of the Hindoos it is stated, by the most respectable Europeans, not merely by Missionaries, but by those who have long held official, civil, and judicial situations among them, that their disregard of truth is uniform and sys-

tematic. When discovered, it causes no surprise in the one party, or humiliation in the other. Even when they have truth to tell, they seldom fail to bolster it up with some appended falsehoods. "It is the business of all," says Sir John Shore, "from the Royt to the Dewan, to conceal and deceive. The simplest matters of fact are designedly covered with a veil, which no human understanding can penetrate." The prevalence of perjury is so universal, as to involve the Judges in extreme perplexity.

8. The horrible practice of offering HUMAN SACRIFICES prevailed throughout every region of the heathen world to a degree which is almost incredible; and it still prevails in many populous countries, where Christianity has not yet been made known. There are incontestable proofs of its having subsisted among the Egyptians, the Syrians, the Persians, the Phœnicians, and all the various nations of the East. It was one of the crying sins of the Canaanites. The contagion spread over every part of Asia, Africa, and Europe. The Greeks and Romans, though less involved in this guilt than many other nations, were not altogether untainted with it. On great and extraordinary occasions they had recourse to what was esteemed the most efficacious and most meritorious sacrifice that could be offered to the gods, the effusion of human blood. But among more barbarous nations, this practice took a firmer root. The Scythians and Thracians, the Gauls and the Germans, were strongly addicted to it; and our own island, under the gloomy and ferocious despotism of the Druids, was polluted with the religious murder of its inhabitants. In the semi-civilized kingdoms on the western side of Africa, as Dahomy, Ashantee, and others, many thousands fall every year victims to superstition. In America, Montezuma offered 20,000 victims yearly to the sun; and modern navigators have found the practice throughout the whole extent of the vast Pacific Ocean.

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As for India, the cries of its abominable and cruel superstitions have been sounded repeatedly in the ears of the British public and its Legislature ; and, including infants and widows, not fewer than 10,000 lives fall a sacrifice to idolatry in our own eastern dominions yearly !

9. This immoral tendency of their religion was confirmed and perfected by the very character and actions of their gods, whose names were perpetually in their mouths ; and whose murderous or obscene exploits, whose villanies and chicaneries, whose hatreds and strifes, were the subjects of their popular legends ; which made up, in fact, the only theology, if so it may be called, of the body of the people.

This sad picture of heathen morals and misery must surely convince you that there was a most pressing *necessity* for a merciful interposition on the part of God, to enlighten this darkness, and to teach men *the truth* as to himself, and all those great principles on which human happiness and salvation depend.

Y. I do indeed see the value and necessity of a *written* and *authorized* revelation from God, and now wait for your next step in this important argument.

CHAPTER III.

THE EVIDENCE BY WHICH A REVELATION MAY BE SATISFACTORILY PROVED TO BE DIVINE.

T. You acknowledge such a revelation from God, as should contain explicit information on the subjects on which mankind had most erred, to have been necessary ; and you very properly expect that a religious system which makes so lofty a claim should be supported by adequate evidence : let me then ask whether you think it possible for God to reveal truth to man.

Y. To deny that would be the greatest absurdity ; for as he made us *capable* of knowledge, he must be

able to *communicate* knowledge to us in various ways — by sensible appearances, — by voices, — by angels, — or by his secret and invisible illumination of the mind of man ; thus introducing ideas into the understanding, which it could not, by its own efforts, have acquired.

T. Right ; but now suppose any man to profess that God had thus spoken to him by a voice, or to have sent an angel to him with a message, or to have illuminated his mind in the way just described ; would you admit the teaching and writing of such a man to be of divine authority, on his own declaration only ?

Y. Certainly not. If he were even a *good* man, I should still think that he might possibly have been *deceived* in whole or in part.

T. How then would you require him to prove that he had received such a revelation from God ?

Y. Indeed it is difficult to conceive how any man, though he might truly have received such a communication, could conceive any other of it. He might make such a *profession* with earnestness ; he might appeal to his *good character* ; he might *reason* on the doctrine, to prove it *rational* and *important* ; but none of these could command the entire credence of mankind, or give his doctrine *authority*.

T. Your remarks are just ; and, therefore, if such a revelation were intended to be a public benefit to mankind, and he who had received it was to be considered in the light of a divine messenger, we must suppose that Almighty God would in some way *accredit* him to others in that character, by enabling him to perform *some work* evidently above mere human power to effect, and which therefore must appear to be wrought by God himself by his instrumentality, as a *sign* of his commission.

Y. This seems to be the only means by which he could obtain credit ; and MIRACLES are, therefore, I

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suppose, urged by believers in the Bible as *signs* of this description.

T. They are so ; but that you may fully perceive the force of the argument which we build upon them, I must ask you to tell me what a miracle is ?

Y. A miracle is a *wonder*, a *prodigy*, or *extraordinary event*.

T. This is a definition of a miracle merely in the *popular* sense ; but in the sense in which we use the term in *theology*, we must be more precise in our definition. A miracle is an effect or event contrary to the established constitutions or course of things, or a sensible suspension or controlment of, or deviation from, the known laws of nature, wrought either by the immediate act, or by the concurrence, or by the permission of God, for the proof or evidence of some particular doctrine, or in attestation of the authority of some particular person.

Y. What end does this definition serve ?

T. It shows you that we take the fairest ground with unbelievers in this question :—that we do not think every *strange event* a miracle ; nor what uneducated men, from their ignorance of the laws of nature, medicinal power, the power of imagination over the bodily frame, or mechanical skill and contrivances, or the science of chemistry, might consider *miraculous* ; but acknowledge that event only to be *miraculous* which manifestly exceeds the extent of *human power*, as measured by those limits of its exertion, which uniform *experience* has defined,—which, as it overrules the established *laws of nature*, must argue the agency of a *divine control*,—and which is so *connected* with the *promulgation* of a professed revelation as clearly to be *designed* to authenticate it.

Y. The question cannot be more fairly stated ; but now I wish to hear the argument you form from the supposed case of the performance of *such* a miracle.

T. The argument is, that as the known and

established course of nature has been fixed by him who is the Creator and Preserver of all things, it can never be violated, departed from, or controlled, but either immediately by himself, or mediately by other beings at his command, and by his assistance or permission ; for if this be not allowed, we must deny that God governs all things. Every real miracle, therefore, is a work of God, done by his permission, and with his concurrence.

Y. But how do you *connect* such miracles with the *authority* of the teachers of a professed revelation ?

T. In the following manner :—

When such unequivocal miracles as those we have pointed out occur only at the time when certain persons profess that they have a divine authority to teach and command mankind, this is a strong presumption that the works are wrought by God in order to authenticate this pretension ; but when they are performed by those persons themselves, at their own violation, and for the express purpose of establishing their mission, inasmuch as such works are allowed to be real miracles, which no power but that of God can effect, it is then clear that God is with them, and that his co-operation is an authenticating and visible seal upon their commission.

Y. This is satisfactory ; but it still remains for you to show that such miracles have been actually wrought by the agents employed by God to communicate to men the revelations of the Scriptures.

T. This might be done at great length, but it will be sufficient to examine a few of the miracles of *Moses* and of *Christ* ; for if their divine commission be thus proved, all the rest follows.

Y. This of course.

T. Well, then, to begin with *Moses*,—

1. The *rod* cast from the hand of *Moses* became a serpent. Here the *subject* was well known ; it was a rod, a branch separated from a tree ; and it was

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obviously contrary to the known and established course of nature that it should undergo so signal a transformation. If the fact can be proved, the *miracle* must therefore follow.

2. The plague of DARKNESS. Two circumstances are to be noted in the relation given of this event in Exodus x. It continued three days; and it afflicted the Egyptians only, for "all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings." The fact here mentioned was of the most public kind; and had it not taken place every Egyptian and every Israelite could have contradicted the account. The phenomenon was not produced by an eclipse of the sun, for no eclipse of that luminary can endure so long; and to what but to a supernatural cause could the distinction made between the Israelites and the Egyptians be attributed, when they inhabited a portion of the same country, and when their neighbourhoods were immediately adjoining? Here, then, are the characters of a true miracle. The established course of natural causes and effects is interrupted by an operation upon that mighty element, the atmosphere. That it was not a casual irregularity in nature, is made apparent from the effect following the volition of a man acting in the name of the Lord of Nature, and from its being restrained by that to a certain part of the same country: "Moses stretched out his hand," and the darkness prevailed everywhere but in the dwellings of his own people. The fact being allowed, the *miracle* of necessity follows.

3. The miracle of dividing the waters of the RED SEA. In this event we observe, as in the others, circumstances which exclude all possibility of mistake or collusion. The subject of the miracle is the sea; the witnesses of it the host of Israel, who passed through on foot, and the Egyptian nation, who lost their King, and his whole army. The miraculous characters of the event are,—the waters are divided,

and stand up on each side;—the instrument is a strong east wind, which begins its operation upon the waters, at the stretching out of the hand of Moses, and ceases at the same signal, and that at the precise moment when the return of the waters would be most fatal to the Egyptian pursuing army. The miraculous character of this event is, therefore, most strongly marked. An expanse of water, and that water a sea of from nine to twelve miles broad, known to be exceedingly subject to agitations, is divided, and a wall of water is formed on each hand, affording a passage on dry land for the Israelites. The phenomenon occurs, too, just as the Egyptian host are on the point of overtaking the fugitives; and ceases at the moment when the latter reach the opposite shore in safety, and when their enemies are in the midst of the passage, in the only position in which the closing of the wall of waters on each side could ensure the entire destruction of so large a force.

4. The falling of the MANNA in the wilderness for forty years, is another unquestionable miracle, and one in which there could be neither mistake on the part of those who were sustained by it, nor fraud on the part of Moses. That this event was not produced by the ordinary course of nature, is rendered certain by the fact, that the same wilderness has been travelled by individuals, and by large bodies of men, from the earliest ages to the present, but no such supply of food was ever met with, except on this occasion. And its miraculous character is further marked by the following circumstances:—That it fell but six days in the week: that it fell in such prodigious quantities, as sustained three millions of souls: that there fell a double quantity every Friday, to serve the Israelites for the next day, which was their Sabbath: that what was gathered on the first five days of the week stank and bred worms, if kept above one day; but that which was gathered on Friday

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kept sweet for two days : and that it continued falling while the Israelites remained in the wilderness, but ceased as soon as they came out of it, and got corn to eat in the land of Canaan. Let these very extraordinary particulars be considered, and they at once confirm the fact, whilst they unequivocally establish the miracle. No people could be deceived in these circumstances ; no person could persuade them of their truth, if they had not occurred ; and the whole was so clearly out of the regular course of nature, as to mark unequivocally the interposition of God.

To the majority of the numerous miracles recorded in the Old Testament, the same remarks apply, and upon them the same miraculous characters are as indubitably impressed. If we proceed to those of Christ, the evidence becomes, if possible, more indubitable. They were clearly above the power either of human agency or natural causes. It would be trifling to examine instances so well known in their circumstances ; for the slightest recollection of the feeding of the multitudes in the desert,—the healing of the paralytic,—the instant cure of the withered hand in the synagogue, near Jerusalem,—the raising from the dead the daughter of Jairus, the widow's son, and Lazarus,—and many other instances of miraculous power,—will be sufficient to convince any ingenuous mind, that all the characters of real miracles meet in them. The great miracle, the resurrection of our Lord himself from the dead, so often appealed to by the first teachers of his religion, crowns the whole.

Y. I now most clearly perceive, that if these facts can be established to have actually taken place, they must be allowed to have been wrought by a *divine power* ; and by the *circumstances* of their performance, or occurrence, to attest both Moses and Christ as *commissioned* by the Author of nature himself. But

is not evidence from PROPHECY also relied on in proof of the divine authority of the Scriptures?

T. It is ; and with reason.

Y. But tell me what you understand by prophecy?

T. Your question is important ; for we do not understand by prophecy an ingenious *anticipation* of future events, which sometimes may be realized ; nor *dark* and *equivocal general predictions*, which may often have a plausible application to different events ; nor the *wise conjectures of observant men*, founded upon *experience*. We here, as in the case of miracles, take open ground with our opponents, and appeal to prophecy only as it bears the following characters :—
1. That it shall have been delivered *before* the event said to be a fulfilment of it ; 2. That it shall have a *particular*, and not a *general*, agreement with that event ; 3. That the event shall be such as no *human sagacity* or *foresight* could possibly *conjecture* and *fortell* ; and, 4. That these predictions shall be *connected* with those who profess to give revelations from God to mankind, in the same manner as in the case of miracles.

Y. This brings the matter to an easy issue ; but in what way is the fulfilment of prophecy proof of a divine commission in him who utters it ?

T. In the following : —

When, for instance, the events are distant many years or ages from the uttering the prediction itself, depending on causes not so much as existing when the prophecy was spoken and recorded, and likewise upon various circumstances, and a long arbitrary series of things, and the fluctuating uncertainties of human volitions ; and especially when they depend not at all upon any external circumstances, nor upon any created being, but arise merely from the counsels and appointment of God himself :—such events can be foreknown only by that Being, one of whose attributes is omniscience, and can be foretold by him

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only to whom the "Father of lights" shall reveal them; so that whoever is manifestly endued with that predictive power, must, in that instance, speak and act by divine inspiration, and what he pronounces of that kind must be received as the word of God; nothing more being necessary to assure us of this, than credible testimony that such predictions were uttered before the event, and conclusive evidence that the records which contain them are of the antiquity to which they pretend.

Y. Can you give any instances of this kind of prophecy, and its fulfilment?

Z. The instances which the Scriptures supply are very numerous; but a few will convince you of the irresistible force of their claim to divine inspiration.

1. We take, first, the celebrated prediction of Jacob before his death: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until SHILOH come," &c.

The word SHILOH signifies, "He who is to be sent," or, "The peace-maker;" in either sense, the application of it to that great Person to whom all the Patriarchs looked forward, and all the Prophets gave witness, is obvious. Before a certain *event*, a certain *person* was to come, to whom the people should be gathered: the event has certainly arrived, but who is the person? The application of the prophecy to Messiah is not an invention of Christians. The ancient Jews, as appears from their commentators, so understood it; and the modern ones are unable to refute the evidence drawn from it in favour of the claims of our Lord. That it is a prediction, is proved from its form, and the circumstances under which it was delivered; that it has received a singular accomplishment in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, is also certain; and it is equally certain that no individual beside can be produced in whom it has been in any sense whatever accomplished. Judah, as a tribe,

remained till after the advent of Jesus Christ, which cannot be said of the long-dispersed ten tribes, and surely of Benjamin, which was merged in the tribe of Judah. Till our Lord came, and had accomplished his work on earth, the tribe of Judah continued. This is matter of unquestionable historic fact. In a short time afterwards it was dispersed, and mingled with the common mass of Jews of all tribes and countries: this is equally unquestionable. Now again we ask, Could either human foresight determine this, or is the application of the event to the prophecy fanciful? The prediction was uttered in the very infancy of the state of Israel, by the father of the fathers of the tribes of that people. Ages passed away; the mightiest empires were annihilated; ten of the chosen tribes themselves were utterly dispersed into unknown countries; another became so insignificant as to lose its designation; one only remained, which imposed its very name upon the nation at large, the object of public observation until the Messiah came,—and that tribe was JUDAH, the tribe spoken of in the prediction, and it remained as it were only to make the fulfilment manifest, and was then confounded with the relics of the rest. What prescience of countless contingencies, occurring in the intervening ages, does this imply!—a prescience truly which can only belong to God.

2. The apostasies and idolatries of his people were foretold by Moses before his death. “I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you, and evil will befall you in the latter days;” (Deut. xxxi. 29;) and he accordingly prophetically declares their punishment.

Let us look into the detail of these threatened punishments. Besides the ordinary inflictions of failing harvests, and severe diseases, in their own country, they were, according to the prophecies of Moses,

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(Deut. xxviii.,) to be "scattered among all people, from the one end of the earth to the other." And where is the trading nation in which they are not, in Asia, Africa, and Europe? Many are even to be found in the West Indies, and in the commercial parts of America. Who could foresee this but God; especially when their singular preservation as a distinct people, a solitary instance in the history of nations, is also implied? They were to find "*no ease*" among these nations; and the almost constant and long-continued persecutions, robberies, and murder of Jews, not only in ancient nations, but especially among Christian nations of the middle ages, and in the Mahometan States to this day, are in wonderful accomplishment of this. They were to be "a proverb and a by-word among all nations;" which has been in every place fulfilled, but was surely above human intelligence to foresee. It was added, "The stranger that is within thee shall get above thee very high, and thou shalt come very low." For a comment on this, let the conduct of the "stranger," the Turk, and others, who inhabit Palestine, towards the Jews who remain there, be recollected: the one party is indeed "very high," and the other "very low." Other parts of this singular chapter present equally striking predictions, uttered more than three thousand years ago, and since remarkably accomplished; but there are some passages in it, which refer in terms so particular to a then distant event,—the utter subversion of their polity and nation by the Romans,—as to demonstrate in the most unequivocal manner the presence of Him to whom all events, the most contingent, minute, and distant, are known with absolute certainty. That the Romans are intended, in ver. 49, by the nation brought from "the end of the earth," distinguished by their well known ensign "the eagle," and by their fierce and cruel disposition, is exceedingly probable; and it is remarkable, that the account which Moses

gives of the horrors of the "siege" of which he speaks, is exactly paralleled by those well-known passages in Josephus, in which he describes the siege of Jerusalem by the Roman army. The last verse of the chapter seems indeed to fix the reference of the foregoing passage to the final destruction of the nation by the Romans, and at the same time contains a prediction, the accomplishment of which cannot possibly be ascribed to accident. "And the Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again with ships, by the way whereof I spake unto thee. Thou shalt see it no more again: and there ye shall be sold unto your enemies for bondmen and bondwomen, and no man shall buy you." On this Dr. Hales remarks, on the authority of their own national historian Josephus, "Of the captives taken at the siege of Jerusalem, above seventeen years of age, some were sent to Egypt in chains; the greater part were distributed through the provinces, to be destroyed in the theatres, by the sword, and by wild beasts; the rest, under seventeen, were sold for slaves, and that for a trifling sum, on account of the numbers to be sold, and the scarcity of buyers; so that at length the prophecy of Moses was fulfilled,—'And no man shall buy.' The part that were reserved to grace the triumph of Vespasian, were probably transported to Italy 'in ships,' or by sea, to avoid a prodigious land-journey thither through Asia and Greece,—a circumstance which distinguished this invasion and captivity from the preceding by the Assorians and Babylonians. In the ensuing rebellion, a part of the captives 'were sent by sea to Egypt,' and several of the ships were wrecked on the coast."

Thus, at a distance of fifteen centuries, were these contingent circumstances accurately recorded by the prophetic spirit of Moses,—the taken of innumerable Jews captive,—their transport to Egypt,—their being sold till the markets for slaves were glutted, and no more buyers were found,—and embarked on board

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vessels, either to grace the triumph of their conqueror, or to find a market in different maritime ports. Is it possible that these numerous and minute circumstances can be referred to either happy conjectures or human foresight?

3. The destruction of many ancient cities was foretold by the Prophets, and has been strikingly verified. As to Babylon, even when it was the most potent city of the world, and the head of the most formidable empire, Isaiah predicts its capture by Cyrus, (mentioning him by name more than one hundred years before he was born,) and its utter destruction. Now the proof of the truth of this prophecy remains *to this day*. In Bishop Newton's *Dissertations on the Prophecies*, which I recommend to your perusal, you will find this part of prophetic Scripture strikingly illustrated. And still further proofs of the wonderfully exact accomplishment of those prophecies may be seen in a highly interesting *Memoir on the Ruins of Babylon*, by Claudius J. Rich, published in 1815. Immense ruins were visited by him near the supposed site of ancient Babylon, which probably are, though the matter cannot be certainly ascertained, the remains of that astonishing city, now indeed swept with the "besom of destruction." He tells us, too, that the neighbourhood is to the present a habitation only for birds and beasts of prey; that the dens of lions, with their slaughtered victims, are to be seen in many places: and that most of the cavities are occupied with bats and owls. It is therefore impossible to reflect without awe upon the passage of Isaiah, written during the prosperity of Babylon, wherein he says, "The wild beasts of the desert shall lie there, and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures, and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there." The present ruins of that city also demonstrate, that the course of the Euphrates has been changed, probably in consequence of the channel formed by Cyrus;

and the yielding nature of the soil demonstrates that such an operation could have been performed by a large army with great facility and despatch.

The ruins examined by Mr. Rich bear testimony to the immense extent of the city as described by ancient authors. Vast masses of masonry, of both burnt and unburnt bricks and bitumen, were observed in various excavations in these huge mountains of ruins, which are separated from each other by several miles. One is called by the Arabs, *Birs Nimroud*; another the *Kasr*, or Palace; and a third, which some have thought to be the ruins of the Tower of Belus, is called by the natives *Mugelibe*, OVERTURNED, which expressive term is also sometimes applied to the mounds of the Kasr.

4. Daniel distinctly predicts the overthrow, in succession, of the *four great empires* of antiquity, the *Babylonian*, the *Persian*, the *Grecian*, and the *Roman*; all which has taken place: but neither the *rise* of the three latter, nor their *fall*, could have been foreseen by man.

5. But the most numerous prophecies relate to MESSIAH, the great end and object of the prophetic dispensation. Of these not a solitary instance, or two, of an equivocal kind, and expressed only in figurative or symbolical language, are to be adduced; but upwards of *one hundred* predictions, generally of very clear and explicit meaning, and each referring to some different circumstance connected with the appearing of Christ, his person, history, and his ministry, have been selected by Divines;—*exclusive* of typical and allusive predictions, and those which in an ultimate and remote sense are believed to terminate in him. The history of Jesus answers to these predictions, and exhibits their exact accomplishment. The Messiah was to be of the seed of David,—born in Bethelhem,—born of a virgin,—an incarnation of Deity, “God with us,—an eminent but unsuccessful teacher;

— he was to open the eyes of the blind, heal the lame and sick, and raise the dead ; — he was to be despised and rejected by his own countrymen, arraigned on false charges, denied justice, and condemned to a violent death ; — he was to rise from the dead, ascend to the right hand of God, and there being invested with power and authority, was to punish his enemies, and establish his own spiritual kingdom, which shall never end. We do not enter into more minute predictions, for the argument is irresistible when founded on these alone ; and we may assert that no man, or number of men, could possibly have made such conjectures. Considered in themselves, this is impossible. What rational man, or number of rational men, could now be found to hazard a conjecture that an incarnation of Deity would occur in any given place and time,—that this Divine Person should teach wisdom, work miracles, be unjustly put to death, rise again, and establish his religion ? These are thoughts which never enter into the minds of men, because they are suggested by no experience, and by no probability arising out of the usual course of human affairs : and yet if the Prophets were not inspired, it would have been as impossible for them to have conceived such expectations, as for us ; and indeed much more so, seeing we are now familiar with a religion which asserts that such events have once occurred. If, then, such events lay beyond not only human foresight, but even human thought, they can only be referred to inspiration. But the case does not close here. How shall we account, in the next place, for these circumstances all having met, strange as they are, in one person, and in one only among all the millions of men who have been born of woman,—and that person, Jesus of Nazareth ? He was of the house and lineage of David,—he was born, and that by a singular event, in Bethlehem,—he professed to be “ God with us,” and wrought miracles to substantiate his claim. At

his word or touch, the "eyes of the blind were opened," "the lame leaped as a hart," the dumb spake, the sick were healed, and the dead lived, as the Prophets had foretold. Of the *wisdom* of his teaching, his recorded discourses bear witness. His *rejection* and unjust *death* by his countrymen are matters of historic fact; his *resurrection* and *ascension* stand upon the lofty evidences which have been already adduced; the destruction of the Jewish nation, according to his own predictions, followed as the proof of the terror of his offended majesty; and his "kingdom" among men continues to this day. There is no possible means of evading the evidence of the fulfilment of these predictions in the person of our Lord.

To all these predictions the words of a modern writer are applicable: "Let now the infidel, or the sceptical reader, meditate thoroughly and soberly upon these predictions. The priority of the records to the events admits of no question. The completion is obvious to every competent inquirer. Here then are facts. We are called upon to account for those facts on rational and adequate principles. Is human foresight equal to the task? Enthusiasm? Conjecture? Chance? Political contrivance? If none of these, neither any other principle that may be devised by man's sagacity, can account for the facts; then true philosophy, as well as true religion, will ascribe them to the inspiration of the Almighty. Every effect must have a cause."

Y. This is evidence not to be controverted; but how shall I know that these miraculous works did in reality take place, and that these *prophecies* were uttered and recorded before the *events* which they foretell?

T. This is the third step in our demonstration; and on this subject you shall receive satisfactory information.

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CHAPTER IV.

THE ANTIQUITY, GENUINENESS, AND AUTHENTICITY
OF THE BOOKS OF SCRIPTURE.

Y. At what period did *Moses* become the legislator of the Jewish nation, and *Christ* appear in the world?

T. *Moses* gave his laws about 1600 years before *Christ*, according to the common chronology, which fixes the birth of our Lord upwards of eighteen centuries ago.

Y. Is there any testimony of ancient *Pagan writers* as to the *existence* and *antiquity* of these distinguished persons?

T. Yes; for though some infidel writers have carried their folly so far as to question their existence, we have the testimony of numerous *Pagan writers*, as well as uninterrupted tradition, to confirm it.

Y. Have the kindness to give me some instances.

T. To the existence of the founders of the Jewish and Christian religion, and the respective antiquity ascribed to them in the Scriptures, many ancient writers give ample testimony; who, being themselves neither of the Jewish nor Christian religion, cannot be suspected of having had any design to furnish evidence of the truth of either. *MANETHO*, *CHEREMON*, *APOLLONIUS*, and *LYSIMACHUS*, besides some other ancient Egyptians whose histories are now lost, are quoted by *Josephus*, as extant in his days; and passages are collected from them, in which they agree that *Moses* was the leader of the Jews when they departed from Egypt, and the founder of their laws. *STRABO*, who flourished in the century before Christ, gives an account of the law of *Moses*, as forbidding images, and limiting divine worship to One Invisible and Universal Being. *JUSTIN*, a Roman historian, in his 36th book, devotes a chapter to an account of the origin of the Jews; represents them as sprung from ten sons of Israel, and speaks of *Moses* as the com-

mander of the Jews, who went out of Egypt, of the institution of the Sabbath, and the Priesthood of Aaron. PLINY speaks of Moses, as giving rise to a sect of magicians, probably with reference to his contest with the magicians of Egypt. TACITUS says, "Moses gave a new form of worship to the Jews, and a system of religious ceremonies, the reverse of every thing known to any other age or country." JUVENAL, in his 14th Satire, mentions Moses as the author of a volume, which was preserved with great care among the Jews; by which the worship of images and eating swine's flesh were forbidden; and circumcision, and the observation of the Sabbath, strictly enjoined. LONGINUS cites Moses as the lawgiver of the Jews, and praises the sublimity of his style in the account he gives of the creation.—As to CHRIST, it is only necessary to give the testimony of two historians whose antiquity no one ever thought of disputing. SÆTONIUS mentions him by name, and says that Claudius expelled from Rome those who adhered to his cause. TACITUS records the progress which the Christian religion had made, and the violent death its founder had suffered; that he flourished under the reign of Tiberius; that Pilate was then Procurator of Judea; and that the original author of this profession was Christ. Thus not only the real existence of the founder of Christianity, but the period in which he lived, is exactly ascertained by writings, the genuineness of which has never been doubted.

Y. Proceed now to show me on what ground I am to admit the professed *antiquity* of the sacred Scripture, which appears also to be an important point.

T. It is; for if the writings in question were composed at, or very near, the time in which the miraculous acts recorded in them were performed, then the evidence of those events having occurred is rendered the stronger, for, in that case, they were written at the time when many were living who might

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have contradicted the narration, if false; and the improbability is also greater, that, in the very age and place when and where those events are said to have been performed, any writer would have dared to run the hazard of prompt, certain, and disgraceful detection. It is equally important in the evidence from prophecy; for if the predictions were recorded long before the events which accomplished them took place, then the only question which remains is, whether the accomplishment actually occurred; for then the evidence becomes irresistible.

Y. I perceive the importance of this inquiry: what then can be adduced?

T. With respect to the Scriptures of the Old Testament, the *language* in which they are written is a strong proof of their antiquity. The Hebrew ceased to be spoken as a living language soon after the Babylonian captivity, and the learned agree that there was no grammar made for the Hebrew till many ages after. The difficulty of a forgery at any period after the time of that captivity is therefore apparent. Of these books, too, there was a Greek translation, commonly called the Septuagint, made about two hundred and eighty-seven years before the Christian era, and laid up in the Alexandrian Library.

Josephus gives a catalogue of the Sacred Books among the Jews, in which he expressly mentions the five books of Moses, thirteen of the Prophets, four of Hymns and Moral Precepts; and if, as many critics maintain, Ruth was added to Judges, and the Lamentations of Jeremiah to his prophecies, the number agrees with those of the Old Testament as it is received at the present day.

The Samaritans, who separated from the Jews many hundred years before the birth of Christ, have in their language a Pentateuch, in the main exactly agreeing with the Hebrew; and the Pagan writers before cited, with many others, speak of Moses not

only as a lawgiver and a Prince, but as the author of books esteemed sacred by the Jews.

Y. If the writings of Moses, then, are not genuine, the forgery must have taken place at a very early period.

T. Yes ; but a few considerations will convince you, that at *any time* this was utterly impossible.

Y. This I shall be happy to see made plain.

T. It is done to my hand by the argument of a celebrated writer,* which I shall abridge, referring you to his work for the proof at large.

“It is impossible that those books should have been received as his, if not written by him, because they speak of themselves as delivered by Moses, and kept in the ark from this time. (Deut. xxxi. 24-26.) A copy of this book was also to be left with the King. (Deut. xvii. 18.)

“This book of the law thus speaks of itself, not only as a history or relation of what things were done, but as the standing and municipal law and statutes of the nation of the Jews, binding the King as well as the people. Now in whatever age after Moses this book may be supposed to have been forged, it was impossible that it could be received as truth, because it was not then to be found (as it professed to be) either in the ark, or with the King, or any where else ; for when first invented, everybody must know that they had never heard of it before.

“Could any man, now at this day, invent a book of statutes or Acts of Parliament for England, and make it pass upon the nation as the only book of statutes that ever they had known ? As impossible was it for the books of Moses (if they were invented in any age after Moses) to have been received for what they declare themselves to be, namely, the statutes and municipal law of the nation of the Jews ; and for any to have persuaded the Jews that they had owned and

*Leslie's "Short and Easy Method with the Deists."

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acknowledged these books all along, from the days of Moses to that day in which they were first invented ; that is, that they had owned them before they had ever so much as heard of them. Nay, more, the whole nation must, in an instant, forget their former laws and government, if they could receive these books as being their former laws. And they could not otherwise receive them, because they vouched themselves so to be. Let me ask the Deists but one short question, Was there ever a book of sham-laws, which were not the laws of the nation, palmed upon any people, since the world began? If not, with what face can they say this of the book of the laws of the Jews? Why will they say that of them, which they confess impossible in any nation, or among any people?

“But they must be yet more unreasonable. For the books of Moses have a further demonstration of their truth than even other law-books have ; for they not only contain the laws, but give an historical account of their institution, and the practice of them from that time :—as of the Passover, in memory of the death of the first-born in Egypt ; (Num. viii. 17, 18 ;) and that the same day, all the first-born of Israel, both of man and beast, were, by a perpetual law, dedicated to God ; and the Levites taken for all the first-born of the children of Israel. And besides these remembrances of particular actions and occurrences, there were other solemn institutions in memory of their deliverance out of Egypt, in the general, which included all the particulars ;—as the Sabbath ; their daily sacrifices and yearly expiation ; their new moons, and several feasts and fasts. So that there were yearly, monthly, weekly, daily remembrances and recognitions of these things.

“Now whenever it can be supposed that these books of Moses were forged in some ages after Moses, it is impossible they could have been received as

true, unless the forgers could have made the whole nation believe that they had received these books from their fathers, had been instructed in them when they were children, and had taught them to their children; moreover, that they had all been circumcised, and did circumcise their children in pursuance to what was commanded in these books; that they had observed the yearly passover, the weekly Sabbath, the new moons, and all these several feasts, fasts, and ceremonies, commanded in these books. But, was it possible to have persuaded a whole nation of men that they had known and practised all these things, if they had not done it? or, secondly, to have received a book for truth, which said they had practised them, and appealed to that practice?

“But now let us descend to the utmost degree of supposition, namely, that these tidings were practised before these books or Moses were forged; and that those books did only impose upon the nation in making them believe, that they had kept these observances in memory of such and such things as were inserted in those books.

“Well, then, let us proceed upon this supposition, (however groundless,) and now, will not the same impossibilities occur as in the former case? For, first, this must suppose that the Jews kept all these observances in memory of nothing, or without knowing anything of their original, or the reason why they kept them. Whereas these very observances did express the ground and reason of their being kept; as the Passover, in memory of God's passing over the children of the Israelites, in that night wherein he slew all the first-born of Egypt; and so of the rest.

“But, secondly, let us suppose, contrary both to reason and matter of fact, that the Jews did not know any reason at all why they kept these observances; yet was it possible to persuade them that they had

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kept these observances in memory of what they had never heard of before that day, whensoever you will suppose that these books of Moses were first forged?

For example: suppose I should now forge some romantic story, of strange things done a thousand years ago; and, in confirmation of this, should endeavour to persuade the Christian world that they had all along, from that day to this, kept the first day of the week in memory of such a hero, an Apollonius, a Barcochebas, or a Mahomet; and had all been baptized in his name; and swore by his name, and upon that very book, (which I had then forged, and which they never saw before,) in their public judicatures; that this book was their Gospel and Law, which they had ever since that time, these thousand years past, universally received and owned, and none other. I would ask any Deist, whether he thinks it possible that such a cheat could pass, or such a legend be received, as the Gospel of Christians; and that they could be made to believe that they had never had any other Gospel?

“Let me give one very familiar example more in this case. There is the Stonehenge in Salisbury Plain: everybody knows it; and yet none knows the reason why those great stones were set there, or by whom, or in memory of what.

“Now, suppose I should write a book to-morrow, and tell them, that these stones were set up by Hercules, Polyphemus, or Garagantua, in memory of such and such of their actions; and for a further confirmation of this, should say in this book, that it was written at the time when such actions were done, and by the very actors themselves, or eye witnesses; and that this book had been received as truth, and quoted by authors of the greatest reputation in all ages since;—moreover, that this book was well known in England, and enjoined by Act of Parliament to be taught our children; and that we did teach it to

our children, and had been taught it ourselves when we were children. I ask any Deist whether he thinks this could pass upon England? and whether, if I, or any other, should insist upon it, we should not, instead of being believed, be sent to Bedlam?"

This able reasoning has never been refuted, nor can be; and if the books of the law must have been written by Moses, it is as easy to prove that Moses himself could not in the nature of the thing have deceived the people by an imposture, and a pretence of miraculous attestations, in order, like some latter lawgivers among the Heathens, to bring the people more willingly to submit to his institutions. The kind of miracles he gives as instances rendered this impossible. "Suppose," says the same writer, "any man should pretend, that yesterday he divided the Thames, in presence of all the people of London, and carried the whole city, men, women, and children, over to Southwark, on dry land, the water standing like walls on both sides: I say, it is morally impossible that he could persuade the people of London that this was true, when every man, woman, and child could contradict him, and, say, that this was a notorious falsehood, for that they had not seen the Thames so divided, nor had they gone over on dry land.

"As to Moses, I suppose it will be allowed me, that he could not have persuaded 600,000 men that he had brought them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, fed them forty years, without bread, by miraculous manna, and the other matters of fact recorded in his books, if they had not been true; because every man's senses then alive must have contradicted it. And therefore he must have imposed upon all their senses, if he could have made them believe it, when it was false, and if no such things were done."

By these arguments, the genuineness and authenticity of the books of Moses are established: and as to those of the Prophets, which, with some predictions

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in the writings of Moses, comprise the prophetic branch of the evidence of the divine authority of the revelations they contain,—it can be proved both from Jewish tradition; the list of Josephus; the Greek translation; and from their being quoted by ancient writers, that they existed many ages before several of those events occurred.

The same author, from whom we have already quoted,* applied his celebrated Four Rules for determining the truth of matters of fact in general, with equal force to the facts of the Gospel history, as to those contained in the Mosaic writings. The rules are, “1. That the matter of fact be such as that men’s outward senses, their eyes and ears, may be judges of it. 2. That it may be done publicly in the face of the world. 3. That not only public monuments be kept up in memory of it, but some outward actions be performed. 4. That such monuments, and such actions and observances, be instituted, and do commence, from the time that the matter of fact was done.”

We have seen the manner in which these rules are applied to the books of Moses. The author thus applies them to the Gospel:—

“I come now to show, that as in the matters of fact of Moses, so likewise all these four marks do meet in the matters of fact which are recorded in the Gospel of our blessed Saviour. And my work herein will be the shorter, because all that is said before of Moses and his books, is every day as applicable to Christ and his Gospel. His works and his miracles are there said to be done publicly, in the face of the world; as he argued with his accusers, ‘I spake openly to the world, and in secret have I said nothing.’ (John xviii. 20.) It is told, Acts ii. 41, that three thousand at one time, and, Acts iv. 4, that above five thousand at another time, were converted upon

* Leslie.

conviction of what themselves had seen, what had been done publicly before their eyes, wherein it was impossible to have imposed upon them. Therefore here were the two first rules before-mentioned.

“Then for the two second: baptism and the Lord's supper were instituted as perpetual memorials of these things; and they were not instituted in after-ages, but at the very time when these things were said to be done; and have been observed, without interruption, in all ages throughout the whole Christian world, down all the way from that time to this. And Christ himself did ordain Apostles and other Ministers of his Gospel, to preach and administer the sacraments, and to govern his church; and that always, even unto the end of the world. (Matt. xxviii. 20.) Accordingly, they have continued by regular succession to this day; and, no doubt, ever shall, while the earth shall last. So that the Christian Clergy are as notorious a matter of fact as the tribe of Levi among the Jews. And the Gospel is as much a law to the Christians, as the Book of Moses to the Jews; and it being part of the matters of fact related in the Gospel, that such an order of men were appointed by Christ, and to continue to the end of the world; consequently, if the Gospel was a fiction, and invented (as it must be) in some ages after Christ, then, at that time when it was first invented, there could be no such order of Clergy, as derived themselves from the institution of Christ; which must give the lie to the Gospel, and demonstrate the whole to be false. And the matters of fact of Christ being pressed to be true, no otherwise than as there was at that time (whenever the Deists will suppose the Gospel to be forged) not only public sacraments of Christ's institution, but an order of Clergy, likewise of his appointment, to administer them; and it being impossible there could be any such things before they were invented, it is as impossible that they should be

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received when invented. And therefore, by what was said above, it was as impossible to have imposed upon mankind in this matter, by inventing of it in after-ages, as at the time when those things were said to be done."

Y. This is indeed very convincing; and on this point I am satisfied, that neither the writings of Moses, nor those of the Evangelists, could have been forged, and yet be received as true in any age.

T. Yet other proofs may be brought from the testimonies of adversaries and Heathens, to the truth of the History of the Evangelists.

Y. I will thank you to point them out.

T. No public contradiction of this history was ever put forth by the Jewish rulers to stop the progress of a hated religion, though they had every motive to contradict it. This silence is not unimportant evidence; but the direct testimonies to the facts are numerous and important.

We have already quoted the testimonies of Tacitus and Suetonius to the existence of Jesus Christ, the founder of the Christian religion, and to his crucifixion in the reign of Tiberius and during the procuratorship of Pontius Pilate, the time in which the Evangelists place that event. Other references to heathen authors, who incidentally allude to Christ, his religion and followers, might be given; such as Martial, Juvenal, Epictetus, Trajan, the younger Pliny, Adrian, Apuleius Lucian of Samosata, &c., some of whom also afford testimony to the destruction of Jerusalem, at the time and in the circumstances predicted by our Saviour, and to the antiquity and genuineness of the books of the New Testament. But, as it is well observed by the learned Lardner, in his "Collection of Jewish and Heathen testimonies," "among all the testimonies to Christianity which we have met with in the first ages, none are more valuable and important than the testimonies of those learned philosophers who wrote against

ns,—Celsus in the second century, Porphyry in the third, and Hierocles and Julian in the fourth.”

CELSUS wrote against Christianity not much above one hundred and thirty years after our Lord's ascension, and his books were answered by the celebrated ORIGEN. He was a most bitter enemy of Christianity, and produces many passages out of the Gospels. He represents Jesus to have lived a few years before. He mentions his being born of a virgin; the angel's appearing to Joseph; the star that appeared at his birth; the wise men that came to worship him when an infant; Herod's massacre of the children; Joseph's fleeing with the child into Egypt by the admonition of an angel; the Holy Ghost's descending on Jesus like a dove, when he was baptized by John; and the voice from heaven declaring him to be “the Son of God;” his going about with his disciples; his healing the sick and lame, and raising the dead; his foretelling his own sufferings and resurrection; his being betrayed and forsaken by his own disciples; his suffering both of his own accord and in obedience to his heavenly father; his grief and trouble, and his praying, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;” the ignominious treatment he met with, the robe that was put upon him, the crown of thorns, the reed put into his hand, his drinking vinegar and gall, and his being scourged and crucified; his being seen after his resurrection by a fanatical woman, (as he calls her, meaning Mary Magdalen,) and by his own companions and disciples; and his showing them his hands that were pierced, the marks of his punishment. He also mentions the angels being seen at his sepulchre.

It is true, he mentions all these things only with a design to ridicule and expose them. But they furnish us with an uncontested proof that the Gospel was then extant. Accordingly, he expressly tells the Christians, “These things we have produced out of your own writings.

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PORPHYRY flourished about the year 270, a man of great abilities ; and his work against the Christians, in fifteen books, was long esteemed by the Gentiles, and thought worthy of being answered by Eusebius, and others in great repute for learning. He was well acquainted with the books of the Old and New Testaments ; and in his writings are plain references to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, John, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistle to the Galatians, and probable references to the other Epistles of St. Paul.

About the year 303, HIEROCLES, a man of learning, and a Magistrate, wrote against the Christians in two books. He was well acquainted with our Scriptures, and made many objections to them, thereby bearing testimony to their antiquity, and to the great respect which was shown them by the Christians ; for he has referred both to the Gospels and to the Epistles. He mentions Peter and Paul by name, and did not deny the truth of our Saviour's miracles ; but, in order to overthrow the argument which the Christians built upon them, he set up the reputed miracles of Apollonius Tyaneus to rival them.

The Emperor JULIAN, who succeeded Constantius in the year 361, wrote also against the Christians, and in his work has undesignedly borne a valuable testimony to the history and books of the new Testament. He allows that Jesus was born in the reign of *Augustus*, at the time of a taxing made in Judea by *Cyrenus* ; and that the Christian religion had its rise, and began to be propagated, in the times of the Roman Emperors *Tiberius* and *Claudius*. He bears witness to the genuineness and authenticity of the four Gospels of *Matthew*, *Mark*, *Luke*, and *John*, and the *Acts of the Apostles*. And he so quotes them as to intimate, that these were the only historical books received by Christians, as of authority ; and the only authentic memoirs of Jesus Christ, and his Apostles, and the doctrines preached by them. - He allows the

early date of the Gospels, and even argues for them. He quotes, or plainly refers to, the Acts of the Apostles, as already said ; and to *St. Paul's Epistles to the Romans, to the Corinthians, and to the Galatians*. He does not deny the miracles of Jesus Christ, but allows him to have healed the blind, and the lame, and the demoniacs, and to have rebuked the winds, and to have walked upon the waves of the sea. He endeavours, indeed, to diminish those works, but in vain. He endeavours also to lessen the number of the early believers, but acknowledges that there were *multitudes of such men in Greece and Italy*, before St. John wrote his Gospel. And he often speaks with great indignation of *Peter and Paul*, those two great Apostles of Jesus, and successful Preachers of his Gospel : so that, upon the whole, he has undesignedly borne witness to the truth of many things recorded in the books of the New Testament. He aimed to overthrow the Christian religion, but has confirmed it.

These testimonies "prove that neither Celsus in the second, Porphyry in the third, nor Julian in the fourth century, suspected the authenticity of these books, or even insinuated that Christians were mistaken in the authors to whom they ascribed them. Not one of them expressed an opinion upon this subject different from that which is holden by Christians. And when we consider how much it would have availed them to cast a doubt upon this point, if they could, and how ready they showed themselves to take every advantage in their power, and that they were men of learning and inquiry, their concession, or rather their suffrage upon the subject, is extremely valuable."

That the facts and statements recorded in the evangelic history were not forgeries of a subsequent period, is made also still more iudubitable from the fact, that the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles are quoted or alluded to by a series of Chris-

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tians, beginning with those who were contemporary with the Apostles, or who immediately followed, and proceeding in close and regular succession from their time to the present. "The medium of proof stated in this proposition," observes Dr. Paley, "is of all others the most unquestionable, and is not diminished by the lapse of ages. Bishop Burnet, in the History of his own Times, inserts various extracts from Lord Clarendon's History. *One* such insertion is a proof that Lord Clarendon's History was extant when Bishop Burnet wrote, that it had been read and received by him as a work of Lord Clarendon's, and regarded by him as an authentic account of the transactions which it relates; and it will be a proof of these points a thousand years hence. The application of this argument to the Gospel history is obvious. If the different books which are received by Christians as containing this history, are quoted by a series of writers, as *genuine* in respect of their authors, and as *authentic* in respect of their narrative, up to the age in which the writers of them lived, then it is clear that these books must have had an existence previous to the earliest of those writings in which they are quoted, and that they were then admitted as authentic.

Y. These testimonies are very satisfactory; but how shall I know that the books now included in the Bible are *all* sacred, and that those mentioned in the above testimonies have not been *altered* and *corrupted*?

T. With respect to the Scriptures of the Old Testament: the list of Josephus, the Septuagint translation, and the Samaritan Pentateuch, are sufficient proofs that the books which are received by us as sacred, are the same as those received by the Jews and Samaritans long before the Christian era. For the New Testament: beside the quotations from almost all the books now included in that volume, and refer-

ences to them by name, in the earliest Christian writers, *catalogues* of authentic scriptures were published at very early periods, which, says Dr. Paley, "though numerous, and made in countries at a wide distance from one another, differ very little, differ in nothing material, and all contain the four Gospels."

Y. But what say you as to their *uncorrupted preservation*?

T. As to the books of the Old Testament, the regard which was paid to them by the Jews, especially to the Law, would render any forgery or material change in their contents impossible. Further, at certain stated seasons, the law was publicly read before all the people of Israel; and it was appointed to be kept in the ark, for a constant memorial against those who transgressed it. Further after the people were divided into two kingdoms, both the people of Israel and those of Judah still retained the same book of the law: and the rivalry or enmity which subsisted between the two kingdoms, prevented either of them from altering or adding to the law. After the Israelites were carried captive into Assyria, other nations were placed in the city of Samaria in their stead; and the Samaritans received the Pentateuch, as well as the Jews, but with this difference, that the Samaritan Pentateuch was in the Old Hebrew or Phœnician characters, in which it remains to this day; whereas the Jewish copy was changed into Chaldee characters, (in which it also remains to this day,) which were fairer and clearer than the Hebrew, the Jews having learned the Chaldee language during their seventy years' abode at Babylon. The jealousy and hatred which subsisted between the Jews and Samaritans, made it impracticable for either nation to corrupt or alter the text in anything of consequence without certain discovery; and the general agreement between the Hebrew and Samaritan copies of the Pentateuch, which are now extant, is such, as

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plainly demonstrates that the copies from which each was taken were originally the same. Nor can any better evidence be desired, that the Jewish Bibles have not been corrupted or interpolated, than this very book of the Samaritan; which, after more than two thousand years' discord between the two nations, varies as little from the other as any classic work in a less tract of time has disagreed from itself by the unavoidable slips and mistakes of so many transcribers.

After the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, the Book of the Law and the Prophets was publicly read in their synagogues every Sabbath-day; which was an excellent method of securing its purity, as well as of enforcing the observation of the law.

After the birth of Christ, the Old Testament was held in high esteem both by Jews and Christians. The Jews also frequently suffered martyrdom for their Scriptures, which they would not have done had they suspected them to have been corrupted or altered. Besides, the Jews and Christians were a mutual guard upon each other, which must have rendered any material corruption impossible, if it had been attempted: for if such an attempt had been made by the Jews, they would have been detected by the Christians.

Lastly, the *agreement of all the manuscripts* of the Old Testament, (amounting to nearly eleven hundred and fifty,) which are known to be extant, is a clear proof of its uncorrupted preservation. These manuscripts, indeed, are not all entire: some contain one part, and some another. But it is absolutely impossible that *every* manuscript, whether in the original Hebrew, or in any ancient version or paraphrase, should or could be *designedly* altered or falsified in the *same* passages, without detection, either by Jews or Christians. Although the various readings, which have been discovered by learned men, who have applied themselves to the collation of every known

manuscript of the Hebrew Scriptures, amount to many thousands, yet these differences are of so little real moment, that their laborious collations afford us scarcely any opportunities of correcting the sacred text in important passages.

Equally satisfactory is the evidence for the integrity of the New Testament, and its uncorruptness in any thing material. So early as the first two centuries of the Christian era, we find the very same *facts*, and the very same *doctrines*, universally received by Christians, which we of the present day believe on the credit of the New Testament.

An universal corruption of those writings was impossible, nor can the least vestige of such a corruption be found in history. They could not be corrupted during the life of their authors; and before their death, copies were dispersed among the different communities of Christians, who were scattered throughout the then known world.

Further, as these books could not be corrupted during the life of their respective authors, and while a great number of witnesses were alive to attest the facts which they record; so neither could any material alteration take place after their decease, without being detected while the original manuscripts were preserved in the churches.—The Christians who were instructed by the Apostles, or by their immediate successors, travelled into all parts of the world carrying with them copies of their writings; from which other copies were multiplied and preserved. Now, as we have already seen, we have an unbroken series of testimonies for the genuineness and authenticity of the New Testament, which can be traced backwards, from the fourth century of the Christian era, to the very time of the Apostles; and these very testimonies are equally applicable to prove its uncorrupted preservation. These sacred records, being universally regarded as the supreme

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standard of truth, were received by every class of Christians with peculiar respect, as being divine compositions, and possessing an authority belonging to no other books. Whatever cotroversies, therefore, arose among different sects, (and the church was very early rent with fierce contentions on doctrinal points,) the Scriptures of the New Testament were received and appealed to by every one of them, as being conclusive in all matters of controversy ; consequently it was morally impossible that any man, or body of men, should corrupt or falsify them in any fundamental article, should foist into them a single expression to favour their peculiar tenets, or erase a single sentence, without being detected by thousands.

If any material alteration had been attempted by the orthodox, it would have been detected by the heretics ; and, on the other hand, if a heretic had inserted, altered, or falsified anything, he would have been exposed by the orthodox, or by other heretics. It is well known that a division commenced, in the fourth century, between the eastern and western Churches, which, about the middle of the ninth century, became irreconcilable, and subsists to the present day. Now it would have been impossible to alter all the copies in the eastern empire ; and if it had been possible in the east, the copies in the west would have detected the alteration. But, in fact both the eastern and western copies agree ; which could not be expected, if either of them was altered or falsified. The uncorrupted preservation of the New Testament is further evident, *from the agreement of all the manuscripts.* The manuscripts of the New Testament, which are extant, are far more numerous than those of any *single* classic author whomsoever ; upwards of three hundred and fifty were collated by Griesbach, for his celebrated critical edition. These manuscripts, it is true, are not all entire : most of them contain only the Gospels ; others the Gospels,

Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles; and some contain the Apocalypse, or Revelation of John. But they were all written in very different and distant parts of the world; several of them are upwards of twelve hundred years old, and give us the books of the New Testament, in all essential points, perfectly accordant with each other. The various readings in no degree whatever affect the general credit and integrity of the text.

Y. I am satisfied as to the uncorrupted preservation of the Bible; but in estimating the credibility of a history, is it not also proper to inquire into the character of the writers?

T. It is; and the inquiry will serve to establish you greatly in the truth of their narrations. They were manifestly *good* men; this was acknowledged by their enemies; and *they* could not therefore knowingly *deceive others*. Nor could they be *deceived themselves*. They could not mistake the facts in the case of the feeding of the five thousand, and the sudden healing of lepers, and lame and blind persons; they could not but know whether he with whom they conversed for forty days was the same Jesus, as he with whom they had daily and familiar intercourse long before his crucifixion. They could not be mistaken as to his ascension into heaven; nor as to the fact whether they themselves were suddenly endowed with the power of speaking in languages which they had never studied; nor as to their being able to work miracles, and to impart the same power to others.

Their worldly interests, too, lay in concealing the truth. By only not bearing testimony, they might have avoided all their sufferings, and have lived quietly. Would men in such circumstances pretend to have seen what they never saw; assert facts of which they had no knowledge; go about lying, to teach virtue; and though not only convinced of Christ's being an impostor, but having seen the failure

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of his imposture in his crucifixion, yet persist in carrying it on, and so persist as to bring upon themselves, for nothing, and with a full knowledge of the consequences, enmity and hatred, danger and death?

Y. This was impossible; but is it not also a great confirmation of the truth of the Evangelical history, that it is so *circumstantial*?

T. Certainly it is; for we never find that forged or false accounts of things abound in *particularities*; and where many particulars are related of time, place, persons, &c., there is always a strong presumption of truth, and on the contrary. Here the evidence is more than presumptive. The history of the Evangelists and of the Acts of the Apostles is so full of references to persons then living, and often to persons of consequence, and to places in which miracles and other transactions took place publicly and not in secret,—and the application of all these facts by the first propogators of the Christian religion to give credit to its divine authority was so frequent and explicit, and often so reprovng to their opposers,—that if they had not been true, they must have been contradicted; and if contradicted on good evidence, the authors must have been overwhelmed with confusion. This argument is rendered stronger when it is considered that “these things were not done in a corner;” nor was the age dark and illiterate, and prone to admit fables. The Augustan age was the most learned the world ever saw. The love of arts, sciences, and literature, was the universal passion in almost every part of the Roman empire where Christianity was first taught in its doctrines, and proclaimed in its facts; and in this inquisitive and discerning era, it rose, flourished, and established itself, with much resistance to its doctrines, *but without being once questioned as to the truth of its historical facts.*

Y. Are we not then at the end of the argument? for as the *genuineness* and *authenticity* of the books of

Scripture have been satisfactorily established, then their relations of *miracles*, and their record of *prophecies*, must of course be true; and if the miracles were actually wrought, and the prophecies were really fulfilled, which no one can reasonably doubt, then it must certainly follow, that the Bible contains a *clearly authenticated revelation of the will of God*.

T. Doubtless a ground has already been laid sufficiently firm for your entire faith in the divine authority of the Scriptures; but other evidence, *confirmatory* of your belief, yet remains to be stated:—so abundant, is the proof.

CHAPTER V.

INTERNAL EVIDENCE OF THE TRUTH OF SCRIPTURE.

T. WHAT is the *internal evidence* of the truth of Scripture?

Y. The excellent nature and tendency of its doctrines; a subject on which I desire to be furnished with some illustrations.

T. Consider, first, the explicitness, sublimity, and evident truth of the representations which the Scriptures make of the nature and attributes of God, respecting which the wisest Heathens fell into errors so gross and fatal. He is there exhibited as the great and the sole First Cause of all things, external, self-existent, present in all places, knowing all things; infinite in power and wisdom; and perfect in goodness, justice, holiness, and truth. These discoveries of revelation have satisfied the human mind on this great and primary doctrine; and have given it a resting-place which it never before found.

Y. Views so just and clear as to the divine nature, I acknowledge, were never acquired by Heathens.

T. Consider also the representations which the Scriptures make of the moral condition of *man*.

Y. But how does this prove the *excellence* of the Scriptures?

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T. By proving their *truth*; for all the representations which they make of our moral condition are substantiated by universal observation and experience; and to know our fallen and corrupt state, is the first step to the remedy.

Y. How does it appear that the account the Scriptures give us of man's moral state, which is indeed sufficiently humbling, is confirmed by observation and experience?

T. The Old and New Testaments agree in representing the human race as *actually* vicious, and capable, when without moral check and control, of the greatest enormities; so that not only individual happiness, but social also, is constantly obstructed or endangered. To this the history of all ages bears witness, and present experience gives its testimony.

But they not only assume men to be actually vicious, but vicious in consequence of a *moral taint* in their nature,—originally and permanently so, but for those provisions of grace and means of sanctity of which they speak. What is thus represented as *doctrine*, appeals to our reason through the evidence of unquestionable *fact*. The *strong tendency* of man to crime, cannot be denied. Civil penal laws are enacted for no other purpose than to repress it; they are multiplied in the most civilized states to shut out the evil in all those new directions towards which the multiplied relations of man, and his increased *power*, arising from increased *intelligence*, have given it its impulse. Every legal deed, with its seals and witness, bears testimony to that *opinion* as to human nature which the experience of man has impressed on man; and history itself is a record chiefly of human guilt, because examples of crime have, everywhere and at all times, been much more frequent than examples of virtue. This tendency to evil the Scriptures tell us arises from “the heart,”—the nature and disposition of man; and it is not otherwise to be account-

ed for. Some indeed have represented the corruption of the race as the result of association and example ; but if men were naturally inclined to good, and averse to evil, how is it that not a few individuals only, but the whole race, have become evil by mutual association? This would be to make the weaker cause the more efficient, which is manifestly absurd.

Y. Is it not a peculiar excellency in the Christian religion, that it points out clearly the means of the *pardon of sin*, and of our *recovery* from our fallen and corrupt state?

T. It is ; and this leads me to notice the next leading doctrine of the Scriptures, which is the restoration of man to the divine favour, through the merits of THE VICARIOUS AND SACRIFICIAL DEATH OF CHRIST, the incarnate Son of God ; and that you may rightly understand this most important doctrine, you must attend to the following particulars :—

The Christian doctrine of atonement is grounded upon the liability of man to punishment in another life, for sins committed against the law of God in this. Men are capable of committing sin, and sin is productive of misery and disorder. These positions cannot be denied. That to violate the laws of God, and to despise his authority, are not light crimes, is clear from considering them in their general effect upon society and upon the world. Nor is there any foundation to suppose that the punishment assigned to sin by the judicial appointment of the Supreme Governor, is confined to the present life. The obvious reason of the case is in favor of the doctrine of future punishment ; for not only is there an unequal administration of punishments in the present life, so that many eminent offenders pass through the present state without any visible manifestation of the divine displeasure against their conduct, but there are strong and convincing proofs that we are placed in a state of trial, which continues *throughout life*, and the *result of*

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which can only be known, and consequently we ourselves can only become subjects of reward or punishment, after our existence in this world has terminated.

It is also the doctrine of Scripture that this future punishment of the incorrigible shall be *final* and *unlimited*. That atonement for the sins of men, which was made by the death of Christ, is represented in the Christian system as the means by which mankind may be delivered from this awful catastrophe. This end it professes to accomplish by means which, with respect to the Supreme Governor himself, preserve his character from being mistaken, and maintain the authority of his government; and with respect to man, give him the strongest possible reason for hope, and render more favourable the circumstances of his earthly probation.

Y. This is so deeply important, that I am anxious to hear the matter fully explained.

T. Attend then:—

How sin may be forgiven without leading to such conceptions of the divine character as would encourage disobedience, and thereby weaken the influence of the divine government, must be considered as a problem of very difficult solution. A government which admitted no forgiveness, would sink the guilty to despair; a government which never punishes offence, is a contradiction,—it cannot exist. Not to punish, is to dissolve authority; to punish without mercy, is to destroy; and where all are guilty, the destruction would be universal. That we cannot sin with impunity, is a matter determined. The Ruler of the world is not careless of the conduct of his creatures; for that penal consequences are attached to offence, is not a subject of argument, but is made evident from daily observation of the events and circumstances of the present life. It is a principle, therefore, already established, that the authority of God must be preserved; and it ought to be remarked, that in that

kind of administration which restrains evil by penalty, and encourages obedience by favour and hope, we and all moral creatures are the interested parties, and not the Divine Governor himself, whom, because of his independent and perfect nature, our transgressions cannot injure. The reasons, therefore, which compel him to maintain his authority, do not terminate in himself. If he becomes a party against offenders, it is for our sake, and for the sake of the moral order of the universe, to which sin, if encouraged by a negligent administration, and by entire or frequent impunity, would be the source of endless disorder and misery : and if the granting of pardon to offence be strongly and even severely guarded, we are to refer it to the moral necessity of the case, as arising out of the general welfare of accountable creatures, liable to the deep evil of sin, and not to any reluctance on the part of our Maker to forgive, much less to anything vindictive in his nature,—charges which have been most inconsiderately and unfairly brought against the Christian doctrine of Christ's vicarious sufferings. If it then be true that the relief of offending man from future punishment, and his restoration to the divine favour, ought, for the interests of mankind themselves, and for the instruction and caution of other beings, to be so bestowed, that no licence shall be given to offence ; that God himself, whilst he manifests his compassion, should not appear less just, less holy, than the maintenance of an efficient and even awful authority requires ; that his *commands* shall be felt to be as compelling, and that disobedience shall as *truly*, though not so *unconditionally*, subject us to the deserved penalty, as though no hope of forgiveness had been exhibited ;—I ask, on what scheme, save that which is developed in the New Testament, these necessary conditions are provided for? Necessary they are, unless we contend for a *licence* and an *impunity* which shall annul the efficient government of

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the universe, a point which no reasonable man will contend for ; and if not, then he must allow that this is strong internal evidence of the truth of the doctrine of Scripture, which makes the offer of pardon consequent only upon the securities we have before mentioned. If it be said that sin may be pardoned in the exercise of the divine prerogative, the reply is, that if this prerogative were exercised towards a part of mankind only, the passing by of the others would be with difficulty reconciled to the divine character ; and if the benefit were extended to all, government would be at an end. Were this principal to regulate human governments, every criminal would escape, and judicial forms would become a subject for ridicule. Nor is it the principle which the Divine Being in his conduct to men in the present state acts upon, though in this world punishments are not final and absolute. Repentance does not restore health injured by intemperance, property wasted by profusion, or character once stained by dishonourable practices. If repentance alone could secure pardon, then all must be pardoned, and government dissolved, as in the case of forgiveness by the exercise of mere prerogative : if a selection be made, then different and discordant principles of government are introduced into the divine administration, which cannot be maintained.

To avoid the force of these obvious difficulties, some have added reformation to repentance, and would restrain forgiveness to those only, who to their penitence add a course of future obedience to the divine law. But a change of conduct does not, any more than repentance, repair the mischiefs of former misconduct. Even in this world we see that the sobriety of the reformed man does not always restore health ; and the industry and economy of the formerly negligent and wasteful, repair not the losses of extravagance. Nor is it necessary to dwell upon the

contradiction which this theory involves to all the principles of government established among men, which in flagrant cases never suspend punishment in anticipation of a change of conduct ; but in the infliction of penalty look steadily to the crime actually committed, and to the necessity of vindicating the violated majesty of the laws.

Y. These are great difficulties.

T. Yes : the question, how may mercy be extended to offending creatures, the subjects of the divine government, without encouraging vice by lowering the righteous and holy character of God, and the authority of his government, in the maintenance of which the whole universe of beings are interested, is at once one of the most important and one of the most difficult which can employ the human mind. None of the theories which have been opposed to Christianity afford a satisfactory solution of the problem. They assume principles either destructive to moral government, or which cannot in the circumstances of man be acted upon. The only answer is found in the holy Scriptures. They alone show, and indeed they alone profess to show, how God may be *just*, and yet the *justifier* of the ungodly. Other schemes show how he may be merciful ; but the difficulty does not lie there. This meets it, by declaring "the righteousness of God, at the same time that it proclaims his mercy. The voluntary sufferings of an incarnate divine person "for us" in our room and stead, magnify the justice of God ; display his hatred to sin ; proclaim "the exceeding sinfulness" of transgression, by the deep and painful sufferings of the substitute ; warn the persevering offender of the terribleness as well as the certainty of his punishment ; and open the gates of salvation to every believing penitent. It is a part of the same divine plan to promise the influence of the Holy Spirit to awaken penitence, and to lead the wandering soul

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back to himself; to renew the fallen nature of man in righteousness, at the moment he is justified through faith; and to place him in circumstances in which he may henceforth "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." *All the ends of government are here answered.* No licence is given to offence; the moral law is unrepealed; a day of Judgment is still appointed; future and eternal punishments still exhibit their awful sanctions; a new and singular display of the awful purity of the divine character is afforded; yet pardon is offered to all who seek it; and the whole world may be saved!

Y. These are indeed glorious discoveries, and ought to kindle supreme and everlasting love to God in our hearts, and to inspire our lips with ceaseless praises.

T. And had I time, I might give you other instances of the excellent doctrines which the Scriptures contain; as that respecting *the influences of the Holy Spirit*, which give a strength to men which they have not by nature; the doctrine of a *Providence*, divine, universal, tender, and watchful; and especially the views afforded us of man's *immortality* and of a *future life*. These, however, you must consider at your leisure.

Y. But you said something of the *moral tendency* of the Scriptures, as a part of the internal evidence of their truth.

T. This tendency is obvious. Nowhere but in the Scriptures have we a perfect system of morals; and the deficiencies of Pagan morality only exalt the purity, the comprehensiveness, the practicability of ours. The character of the Being acknowledged as Supreme must always impress itself upon moral feeling and practice; the obligation of which rests upon his will. We have seen the views entertained by Pagans on this all-important point, and their effects. The God of the Bible is "holy," without

spot; "just," without intermission or partiality; "good," boundlessly benevolent and beneficent: and his law is the image of himself, "holy, just, and good." These great moral qualities are not, as with them, so far as they were apprehended, merely abstract and therefore comparatively feeble in their influence. In the person of Christ, our God incarnate, they are seen exemplified in action, displaying themselves amidst human relations, and the actual circumstances of human life. With them, the authority of moral rules was either the opinion of the wise, or the tradition of the ancient, confirmed, it is true, in some degree, by observation and experience; but to us, they are given as commands immediately from the Supreme Governor, and ratified as HIS by the most solemn and explicit attestations. With them, many great moral principles, being indistinctly apprehended, were matters of doubt and debate; to us, the explicit manner in which they are given excludes both; for it cannot be questioned whether we are commanded to love our neighbour as ourselves; to do to others as we would they should do to us, a precept which comprehends almost all relative morality in one plain principle; to forgive our enemies; to love all mankind; to live "righteously" and "soberly," as well as "godly;" or that Magistrates must be a terror only to evil-doers, and a praise to them that do well; that subjects are to render honour to whom honour, and tribute to whom tribute, is due; that masters are to be just and merciful, and servants faithful and obedient. By Christianity, impurity of thought and desire is restrained in an equal degree as their overt act in the lips and conduct. Humanity, meekness, gentleness, placability, disinterestedness, and charity, are all as clearly and solemnly enjoined as the grosser vices are prohibited: and on the unruly tongue itself is impressed "the law of kindness." Nor are the injunctions feeble: they are strictly LAW, and not mere *advice* and re-

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commendations. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord;" and thus our entrance into heaven, and our escape from perdition, are made to depend upon this preparation of mind.

Y. But is there not a species of evidence in favour of Christianity, which is called COLLATERAL?

T. There is: and it arises from so many sources, that it cannot be fully exhibited in this conversation; but I will give you one or two examples of it.

Y. You will oblige me.

T. *The marvellous propagation of Christianity in the first three centuries is evidence of this kind, and intimates to us that its facts could not be disputed; that miracles were really wrought to produce conviction in the minds of men so rapidly and effectually; and that a divine power accompanied the promulgation of its doctrines.*

Y. But did not the doctrine of Mahomet spread rapidly and extensively?

T. Yes; but that was propagated by the *sword*, and entitled all who embraced it to *honours* and *privileges*, and, above all, encouraged men in their *vices*: but in less than three centuries, Christianity overturned Paganism in the Roman empire, and spread itself through the civilized world, *in opposition to human power*; and when, through a great part of this period, its professors were exposed to continual *reproach*, and often to terrible *persecutions*; and although it *discouraged*, reprov'd, and forbade every kind of vice. The first Preachers of the Gospel, though unsupported by human power, and unpatronized by philosophic wisdom, and even in opposition to both, succeeded in effecting a revolution in the opinions and manners of a great portion of the civilized world, to which there is no parallel in the history of mankind. Though aspersed by the slander of the malicious, and exposed to the sword of the powerful, in a short period of time they induced mul-

titudes of various nations, who were equally distinguished by the peculiarity of their manners, and the diversity of their language, to forsake the religion of their ancestors. The converts whom they made deserted ceremonies and institutions which were defended by vigorous authority, sanctified by remote age, and associated with the most alluring gratification of the passions.

After their death, the same doctrines were taught, and the same effects followed, though successive and greivous persecutions were waged against all who professed their faith in Christ, by successive Emperors and inferior Magistrates; so that about A.D. 140 Justin Martyr writes,—“There is not a nation, Greek or Barbarian, or of any other name, even of those who wander in tribes, and live in tents, among whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered to the Father and Creator of the universe in the name of the crucified Jesus.”

Y. The success of Christianity, and that of the religion of Mahomet, I now plainly perceive are not parallel, but contrary, cases.

T. The *actual effect* produced by this new religion upon society, and which it is still producing, is another point in the collateral evidence. In every Pagan country where it has prevailed, it has abolished *idolatry*, with its sanguinary and polluted rites. It also effected this mighty revolution,—that the sanctions of religion should no longer be in favour of the worst passions and practices, but be directed against them. It has raised the standard of *morality*, and by that means, even where its full effects have not been suffered to display themselves, has insensibly improved the manners of every Christian state. What heathen nations are, in point of morals, is now well known; and the information on this subject, which for several years past has been increasing, has put it out of the power of Infidels to urge the superior manners of either

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China or Hindostan. It has abolished *infanticide* and *human sacrifices*, so prevalent among ancient and modern Heathens ; put an end to *polygamy* and *divorce* ; and, by the institution of marriage in an indissoluble bond, has given birth to a felicity and sanctity in the domestic circle which it never before knew. It has exalted the condition and character of *woman*, and by that means has humanized *man*. It abolished domestic slavery in ancient Europe ; and from its principles the struggle which was maintained with African slavery drew its energy, and obtained a triumph as complete. It has given a milder character to *war*, and taught modern nations to treat their prisoners with humanity, and to restore them by exchange to their respective countries. It has laid the basis of a *jurisprudence* more just and equal ; given civil rights to subjects ; and placed restraints on absolute power. It has crowned its achievements by its *charity*. Hospitals, schools, and many other institutions for the aid of the aged and the poor, are almost exclusively its own creations, and they abound most where its influence is most powerful. The same effects to this day are resulting from its influence in those heathen countries into which the Gospel has been carried by Missionaries sent out from this and other Christian states.

Y. These effects surely prove, that so benevolent, holy, and beneficial a system of religion is worthy of universal acceptance.

CHAPTER VI.

OBJECTIONS ANSWERED.

Y. I THANK you for this account of the evidences of the truth of the Scriptures, which has greatly confirmed and established my faith ; but I have occasionally heard *objections* to the Scriptures, which I will thank you to enable me to answer, should I again meet with them in reading or in conversation.

T. State those of them you recollect.

Y. Against the evidence from *miracles* I have heard it urged, that the Egyptian magicians, in several instances, wrought the same miracles as Moses.

T. The wonders wrought by the magicians were probably *juggling tricks*. These idolaters were perhaps assisted in their *sleights of hand* by evil spirits: but when they went beyond what could by any sleight of hand or subtle contrivances be imitated, as in the plague of *lice*, they were themselves obliged to confess the interposition of "the finger of God."

Y. But several pretended heathen miracles, as well as those said to take place in the Church of Rome, are often mentioned by infidels.

T. They are; yet even they hesitate to found any serious argument upon them. A learned Divine has laid down some just rules for trying miracles, and observes:—

That we may reasonably suspect any accounts of miracles to be false, if they are not published *till long after the time* when they are said to have been performed,—or if they were not first published *in the place* where they are said to have been wrought,—or if they probably were suffered to pass *without examination*, in the time and at the place where they took their rise. These are *general* grounds of suspicion; to which may be added particular ones, arising from any circumstance which plainly indicate imposture and artifice on the one hand, or credulity and imagination on the other.

Before such tests all Pagan, Popish, and other pretended miracles, without exception, shrink; and they are not for a moment to be brought into comparison with works wrought *publicly*,—in the sight of *thousands*, and those often opposers of the system to be established by them,—works not by any ingenuity whatever to be resolved into artifice on the one part, or into the effects of imagination on the other,—works performed before scholars, statesmen, rulers, per-

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secutors ;—of which the instances are numerous, and the places in which they occurred various,—works published at the time, and on the very spot,—works not in favour of a ruling system, but directed against every other religious establishment under heaven ; and, for giving their testimony to which, the original witnesses had reason to expect, and did in most instances, incur reproach, stripes, imprisonment, and death.

Y. This is very convincing as to miracles ; but as to the *prophecies* of Scripture, I have heard them compared to the heathen *oracles*, which pretended to foretell future things, and whose predictions are in some instances said to have been remarkably accomplished.

T. No contrast can be greater.

The first great distinction lies in this, that none of the predictions ever uttered by the Delphic or other oracles, went deep into futurity. They relate to events on the eve of taking place, and whose *preparatory circumstances* were known. The oracles did not even pretend to foresee things at the distance of a few years ; though even a hundred years had been a very limited period in comparison of the range of the prescience of inspired Prophets, who looked through the course of succeeding ages, to the end of time.

A second contrast lies in the ambiguity of the oracular responses. The prophecies of Scripture are sometimes obscure, though this does not apply to the most eminent of those which have been most signally fulfilled, as we have already seen ; but they never *equivocate*. For this the Pythian oracle was notorious. Historians relate that CRÆSUS, who had expended large sums upon the agents of this delusion, was backed by an equivocation, through which, interpreting the response most favourably for himself, he was induced to make an unsuccessful war on Cyrus. In

his subsequent captivity he repeatedly reproached the oracle, and charged it with falsehood. The response delivered to PYRRHUS was of the same kind ; and was so expressed as to be true, whether Pyrrhus should conquer the Romans, or the Romans Pyrrhus. Many other instances of the same kind are given ; not to mention the trifling, and even bantering and jocose, oracles which were sometimes pronounced.

The venality, wealth, and servility of the managers of the Delphic oracle, present another contrast to the poverty and disinterestedness of the Jewish Prophets, whom no gifts could bribe, and no power awe in the discharge of their duty. Demosthenes, in one of his speeches to the Athenians, publicly charges this oracle with being "gained over to the interests of King Philip;" and the Greek historians give other instances in which it had been corrupted by money. Can then the prophecies of Scripture be paralleled with these dark, and venal, and delusive oracles, without impiety? And could any higher honour be wished for the Jewish Prophets, than the comparison into which they are thus brought with the corrupt agents of Paganism at Delphos and other places.

Y. Ridicule has been sometimes cast upon the Prophets by profane writers, for those significant actions by which they illustrated their predictions ; as when Jeremiah hides his girdle in a hole of the rock, and Ezekiel weighs the hair of his head in balances. How is this explained?

T. This ridicule can only proceed from ignorance. In the early ages of the world, the deficiency of language was often supplied by signs ; and when language was improved, the practice remained after the necessity was over ; especially among the Easterns, whose natural temperament inclined them to this mode of conversation. The charges, then, of absurdity and fanaticism, brought against the Prophets vanish of themselves. The *absurdity* of an action consists in

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its being extravagant and insignificant ; but use, and a fixed application, made the actions in question both sober and pertinent. We may add, that several of these actions were performed in *vision* ; and that considering the genius of the people who were addressed, they were calculated strongly to excite their attention, which was the end for which they were adopted.

Y. It is objected to the Bible, that it represents God as giving command to the Israelites to exterminate the nations of Canaan.

T. This objection cannot be argued upon the mere ground that it is contrary to the divine justice or mercy to cut off a people indiscriminately, from the eldest to the youngest, since this is done in earthquakes, pestilences, &c. The character of the God of nature is not therefore contradicted by that ascribed to the God of the Bible. The whole objection resolves itself into this question : Was it consistent with the character of God to employ *human agents* in this work of destruction ? Who can prove that it was not ? No one ; and yet here lies the whole stress of the objection. The Jews were not rendered more cruel by their being so commissioned, for we find them much more merciful in their practice than other ancient nations ;—nor can this instance be pleaded in favour of exterminating wars, since there was in the case a special commission for a special purpose, by which it was limited. Other considerations are also to be included. The sins of the Canaanites were of so gross a nature, that it was necessary to mark them with signal punishments for the admonition of surrounding nations ; the employing of the Israelites as instruments, under a special and publicly-proclaimed commission, connected the punishment more visibly with the offence, than if it had been inflicted by the array of warring elements ; whilst the Israelites themselves would be more deeply

impressed with the guilt of idolatry, and its ever accompanying polluted and sanguinary rites. Finally, the Canaanites had been long spared, and in the meantime both warned by partial judgments, and reproved by the remaining adherents of the patriarchal religion who resided among them.

Y. The intentional offering of Isaac by Abraham has often been objected to.

T. The answer is, 1. That Abraham who was in the habit of sensible communication with God, could have no doubt of having received a divine command; and the right of God to take away the life he had given, cannot be questioned. 2. That he proceeded to execute the command of God in *faith*, as the Apostle Paul has stated, that God would raise his son from the dead. The whole transaction was extraordinary, and cannot therefore be judged by common rules; and it could only be fairly objected to, if it had been so stated as to encourage human sacrifices. Here, however, are sufficient guards. An indubitable divine command was given; the sacrifice was prevented by the same authority; and the history stands in a book which represents human sacrifices as an abomination to God.—But I will save you the trouble of enumerating several minor objections, by glancing at them collectively.

The objections which have been raised against characters and transactions in the books of Judges, Samuel, and Kings, are dissipated by the single consideration, that where they are obviously immoral or unjustifiable, they are never *approved*; and are merely stated as *facts of history*. The conduct of Ehud, of Samson, and of Jephthah, may be given as instances.

The advice of David, when, on his death-bed, respecting Joab and Shemei, has been attributed to his private resentment. This is not the fact. He spoke in his character of King and Magistrate, and gave his advice on public grounds, as committing the kingdom to his son.

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The conduct of David also towards the Ammonites, in putting them "under saws and harrows of iron," has been the subject of severe animadversion. But the expression means no more than that he employed them in laborious works, as *sawing*, making iron harrows, hewing wood, and making bricks; the Hebrew prefix signifying *to* as well as *under*. "He put them to saws and harrows of iron," (some render it *iron mines*,) "and to axes of iron, and made them to pass through the brick-kiln."

With respect to the *imprecations* found in many parts of Scripture, and which have been represented as expressions of revenge and malice, it has been often and satisfactorily observed that they are *predictions*, and not *anathemas*; the imperative mood being put for the future tense, according to the Hebrew idiom.

With respect to all other objections, it has been well observed, "that a little skill in the original languages of the Scriptures, their idioms and properties, and in the times, occasions, and scope of the several books, as well as in the antiquities and customs of those countries which were the scenes of the transactions recorded, will always clear the main difficulties."

Y. These general observations will be of use to me in future. But what say you to the common objection, that the Scriptures require us to believe things incomprehensible to human reason?

T. I answer, that many doctrines and duties are comprehensible enough; no mystery at all is involved in them; and as to incomprehensible subjects, nothing is more obvious than that a *fact* may be the subject of revelation, as that God is eternal and omnipresent, whilst the *mode* may still remain mysterious and incomprehensible. The fact itself is not hidden, or expressed in language or in symbol so equivocal as to throw the meaning into difficulty,—the only sense

in which the objection could be valid. As a fact, it is clearly revealed that these are attributes of the divine nature ; but both, notwithstanding that clear and indubitable revelation, are still incomprehensible. It is not revealed HOW God is eternal and omnipresent,—nor is such a revelation pretended ; but it is revealed THAT HE IS SO ; not HOW a Trinity of persons exists in a Unity of essence, but THAT SUCH IS the mode of the divine existence. If, however, men hesitate to admit incomprehensible subjects as to matters of faith, they cannot be permitted to fly for relief from revelation to philosophy ; and much less to assert its superiority, as to clearness of manifestation, to the holy Scriptures. There too it will be seen that mystery and revelation go inseparably together ; that he who will not admit the mystery, cannot have the benefit of the revelation, and that he who takes the revelation of *facts*, embraces at the same time the mystery of their *causes*. The facts, for instance, of the attraction of gravitation, of cohesion, of electricity, of magnetism, of congelation, of thawing, of evaporation, are all admitted. The experimental and inductive philosophy of modern times has made many revelations of the *relations*, and, in some instances, of the *proximate* causes of these phenomena ; but the *real causes* are all confessedly hidden. With respect to mechanics, says a writer who has devoted his life to philosophical studies,* “This science is conversant about *force, matter, time, motion, space*: each of these has occasioned the most elaborate disquisitions, and the most violent disputes. Let it be asked, What is *force*? If the answerer be candid, his reply will be, ‘I cannot tell, so as to satisfy every inquirer, or so as to enter into the essence of the thing.’ Again, What is *matter*? ‘I cannot tell;’ What is *motion*? ‘I cannot tell;’ and so of the

* Dr. Gregory’s “Letters on the Christian Religion.”

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rest. The fact of the communication of motion from one body to another, is as inexplicable as the communication of divine influences. How, then, can the former be admitted with any face, while the latter is denied solely on the ground of its incomprehensibility?"

Y. It has been objected to the Mosaic chronology, that it fixes the era of creation only about 4000 years earlier than the Christian era ; and against this, evidence has been brought from the chronology of certain ancient nations.

T. The objections drawn from this source have of late rapidly weakened, and are in fact given up by many whose deference to the authority of Scripture is very slight, though but a few years ago nothing was more confidently urged by sceptical writers than the refutation of Moses by the Chinese, Hindoo, and Egyptian chronologies, founded, as it was then stated, on very ancient astronomical observations preserved to the present day. It is, however, now clearly proved, that the astronomical tables, from which it has been attempted to assign a prodigious antiquity to the Hindoos, have been culculated backwards;* and among the Chinese, the earliest astronomical observation that appears to rest upon good grounds, is now found to be one made not more than two thousand nine hundred years ago.† As for the conclusion drawn from the supposed Zodiacs in the Temples of Esneh Dendara in Egypt, it is now strongly doubted whether the figures represented upon them are astronomical or mythological, that is, whether they are Zodiacs at all. Their astronomical character is strongly denied by Dr. Richardson, a late traveller, who examined them with great care, and who gives large reasons for his opinion. Even if the astronomical character of these assumed Zodiacs be allowed, they are found to prove nothing. M. Biot, an eminent French mathematician,

* Cuvier's "Theory of the Earth."

† Ibid.

has recently fixed the date of the oldest of them at only 716 years before Christ.

Y. Geologists have sometimes contended that the period of time requisite for the formation of the primitive structure of the earth, argues that the world is much older than the Mosaic account seems to intimate.

T. But Geologists of equal eminence have been of a contrary opinion; and the great differences among those who profess this science, render objections of this kind of little weight. Besides, two things are assumed in the objection without any proof: 1. That the primitive strata were not *created* in their present composite form: 2. That if progressively formed, the processes were always as slow as at present:—neither of which can be proved.

Y. Has not the general *deluge* been objected to?

T. It has; but the whole earth bears testimony to the fact. It is not only preserved in the traditions of all nations, but after all the philosophical arguments which were formerly urged against it, philosophy has at length acknowledged that the present surface of the earth must have been submerged under water. "Not only," says Kirwan, "in every region of Europe, but also of both the old and new continents, immense quantities of marine shells, either dispersed or collected, have been discovered." This and several other facts seem to prove, that at least a great part of the present earth was, before the last general convulsion to which it has been subjected, the bed of an ocean which at that time was withdrawn from it. Other facts seem also to prove with sufficient evidence, that this recession of the waters, which once covered the parts now inhabited by men, was not gradual but *violent*, such as may be supposed from the brief but emphatic relation of Moses. The violent action of water has left its traces in various undisputed phenomena. "Stratified mountains of various heights

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exist in different parts of Europe, and of both continents, in and between whose strata various substances of marine, and some vegetables of *terrestrial* origin repose either in their natural state or petrified."* "To overspread the plains of the Arctic Circle with the shells of Indian seas, and with the bodies of elephants and rhinoceri, surrounded by masses of submarine vegetation; to accumulate on a single spot, as at La Bolca, in promiscuous confusion, the marine productions of the four quarters of the globe; what conceivable instrument would be efficacious but the rush of mighty waters?"† These facts, about which there is no dispute, and which are acknowledged by the advocates of each of the prevailing geological theories, give a sufficient attestation to the Deluge of Noah, in which the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and from which precisely such phenomena might be expected to follow.

Y. Has it not been supposed that the *ark* could not contain the living creatures which are said to have been received into it?

T. Yes; but without reason. Dr. Hales proves the *ark* to have been of the burden of 42,413 tons; and asks, "Can we doubt of its being sufficient to contain eight persons, and about two hundred or two hundred and fifty pair of four-footed animals,—a number to which, according to M. Buffon, all the various distinct species may be reduced,—together with all the subsistence necessary for a twelvemonth, with the fowls of the air, and such reptiles and insects as cannot live under water?" All these various animals were also controlled by the power of God, whose special agency is supposed in the whole transaction, and "the lion was made to lie down with the kid."

Y. Is it not objected, that all the nations of men, so

* Kirwan's "Geological Essays."

† Gisborne's "Testimony of Natural Theology."

ifferent in *colour* and *feature*, could not, as the Scriptures declare, descend from one common pair?

T. Formely this was objected; but now even infidel and sceptical philosophers acknowledge that *colour* and other *differences* indicate only *varieties* in man, but do not prove *distinct species*; and so this objection may be considered as given up.

Y. These are certainly the most weighty objections I have met with, and I see that they admit of satisfactory answers; and that even if they presented us with *greater* and *real difficulties* they would weigh nothing against that *great mass of evidence* which establishes the holy Scriptures to be *in truth* the WORD OF GOD.

T. Go then, youth, and "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" these sacred writings. Let no sophistry of wicked men lead you from THE TRUTH, and rob you of your BIRTHRIGHT to salvation and immortality. The Bible will be your guide through life, your comfort in affliction, and your hope in death, if you embrace the doctrines it teaches, and believe on the Saviour it sets before you. It is a book which none but

"Bold, bad men despise;"

and which the *wisest* and *best* men of all ages have loved and revered as "the word of truth, and the Gospel of salvation."