



63-2  
18

**LIBRARY**  
OF THE  
**THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,**  
AT  
PRINCETON, N. J.

DONATION OF  
SAMUEL AGNEW,

OF PHILADELPHIA, PA.

Letter.....

No.

March 25th 1858

Case, Division	5CC
Shelf, Section	1951
Book, No.	v. 1





# DISCOURSES

RELATING TO

*The Evidences of Revealed Religion,*

DELIVERED IN THE

CHURCH OF THE UNIVERSALISTS,  
AT PHILADELPHIA, 1796.

AND

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF MANY OF THE  
/ HEARERS.

BY JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL.D. F.R.S.  
Ec. Ec.

---

Be ready always to give an answer to every man that  
asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.

I PET. iii. 15.

---

PHILADELPHIA,  
PRINTED FOR T. DOBSON, BY JOHN THOMPSON.  
1796.

---

*Copy Right secured according to Law.*

1841

1842

1843

1844

1845

1846

1847

1848

## THE DEDICATION.

---

To JOHN ADAMS,

VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF  
AMERICA.

DEAR SIR,

*THE happiness I have had of your acquaintance and correspondence ever since your embassy to England, our common friendship for Dr. Price, the ardent friend of liberty and of America, your steady attachment to the cause of christianity, the favourable attention you gave to the following Discourses, when they were delivered, and the wish you expressed that they might be published, induce me to take the liberty to dedicate them to you.*

*Statesmen who have the firmness of mind to profess themselves Christians, and who have a just sense of the importance of christianity, are not numerous; and those of them who adopt a rational christianity, the evidences and doctrines of which will bear to be submitted to the test of reason, in this age, in which, while many are carried away by the prevailing tide of infidelity, others oppose it by an enthusiasm which disclaims the aid of reason, are still fewer; and are therefore entitled to the greater esteem of those who entertain the same sentiments.*

*We shall, no doubt, ourselves be ranked with enthusiasts by those unbelievers (and by far the greater part of them are of this class) who have become so without any just knowledge of the subject, or investigation of the evidence of revelation. But the contempt of such persons, whatever rank they may hold in the political or the learned world, is itself contemptible. Every serious inquirer after truth, will respect other serious inquirers, though their opinions should differ ever so much. But the censures of men, whether well or ill informed, will appear of little moment to those who look to the decision of the impartial Judge of all. And, mindful of his solemn warning, we must not be ashamed of him, or of his cause, in any circumstances, however unfavourable, lest he should be ashamed of us at a time when his favour will be of infinitely greater moment to us than any thing else.*

*You and I, Sir, are advancing to a period of life in which these views naturally open more and more upon us. We find this world receding, and another fast approaching, and we feel the importance of having something to look to when the present scene of things shall be closed. And whatever we value for ourselves, it behoves us to recommend to others. You will, therefore, rejoice if an exhibition of the evidences of revealed religion, such as is contained*

*tained in these Discourses, should produce any effect.*

*It is happy that, in this country, religion has no connection with civil power, a circumstance which gives the cause of truth all the advantage that its best friends can desire. But religion is of as much use to Statesmen as to any individuals whatever. Christian principles will best enable men to devote their time, their talents, their lives, and what is often a greater sacrifice still, their characters, to the public good ; and in public life this will often be, in a great measure, necessary.*

*Let a man attain to eminence, of any kind, and by whatever means, even the most honourable, he will be exposed to envy and jealousy, and of course he must expect to meet with calumny and abuse. It was the lot of our Saviour himself, and it is a part of the wise order of providence that it should always be so. For, besides that it is of the greatest importance to the community, that every person in a public station, should have the strongest motive for the greatest circumspection, unmixed praise is what no human mind can bear without injury. An undue elation, which would soon be found to be as hurtful to himself as unpleasant to others, would be the necessary consequence*

*sequence of it. And what principles can enable a man to consult the real good of his fellow citizens, without being diverted from his generous purpose by a regard to their opinion concerning him, like those of the Christian, who can be satisfied with the approbation of his own mind (which of course draws after it that of his Maker) and who, though not insensible to due praise, can despise calumny, and steadily overlooking every thing that is intermediate, patiently wait for the day of final retribution? As these principles enabled the apostles to rejoice in tribulation, and persecution of every kind, so the virtuous statesman will not complain of that abuse which operates so favourably both with respect to his own mind, and the interests of his country. They are Christian principles that best enable a man to bear this necessary and excellent discipline, and form the truly disinterested and magnanimous patriot.*

*I cannot conclude this address without expressing the satisfaction I feel in the government which has afforded me an asylum from the persecution which obliged me to leave England, persuaded that, its principles being fundamentally good, instead of tending, like the old governments of Europe, to greater abuse, it will tend to continual melioration. Still, however, my utmost wish is to live as a stranger*

*ger*

*ger among you, with liberty to attend without interruption to my favourite pursuits; wishing well to my native country, as I do to all the world, and hoping that its interests, and those of this country, will be inseparable, and consequently that peace between them will be perpetual.*

*I am, with the greatest esteem,*

*Dear Sir,*

PHILADELPHIA,

*May, 1796.*

*Yours sincerely,*

J. PRIESTLEY.



## THE PREFACE.

THE Discourses contained in this volume may be considered as supplemental to those which I delivered in England relating to the same subject, just before I left that country, and which have been re-printed in this. Being requested to preach in this city, I thought I could not make choice of any subjects more unexceptionable, or more useful, than of such as relate to the *evidences of revealed religion*, in an age abounding with unbelievers, many of whom have become so merely for want of better information. Being unwilling to go over the same ground that I had been upon before, I have made these discourses interfere as little as possible with the former. Some of the same observations will, no doubt, be found in both; but they are not many, and of such particular importance, that they cannot be too much impressed on the minds of christians.

As

As I had no intention of publishing these discourses, at least at this time, I did not note the authorities I have made use of in them, as there could not have been any propriety, or use, in reciting them from the pulpit; and being at a distance from my library, I cannot add them now. But they are such as, I am confident, no person at all acquainted with the subjects will call in question. They were by no means originally collected by myself. The far greater part of them have been frequently quoted, and their accuracy never disputed. I had little to do besides collecting, arranging, and applying them, in a manner somewhat more adapted to my present purpose. The greater part of them will be found in *Leland's Necessity of Revelation*, *Young's Discourses on Revelation the Cure of superstition*, and the *Letters of some Jews to Voltaire*, all which works I would recommend to the attentive perusal of my readers. The doctrines of the heathen philosophers were almost all copied *verbatim* from *Brucker's History of Philosophy abridged by Dr. Enfield*, a truly valuable, accurate, and well digested work. The account of the Grecian oracles, and various of their superstitions, will be found in *Potter's Antiquities of Greece*, a common, but most excellent work.

The

The *Second Part of Mr. Paine's Age of Reason* being published in this city during the delivery of these Discourses, I thought proper to animadvert upon such parts of it as appeared to me most deserving of notice. I had once thought of replying to this part of the work more at large, as I did to the first part ; but I afterwards thought that assertions so extravagant and ill founded as Mr. Paine's generally are, may be safely left to have their full effect, as it can only be upon the minds of persons so extremely ignorant and prejudiced, that no refutation would be attended to by them, so that it would only be throwing *pearls before swine*.

So great is Mr. Paine's ignorance with respect to subjects of this nature, that he maintains, page 35, that the book of Job has " all the " circumstantial evidences of being an original " book of the Gentiles," principally because he finds in it the mention of *Orion*, *Arcturus*, and the *Pleiades*, which are Greek words ; when these terms occur only in translations, those in the original being quite different. Surely he had access to some unbelievers, who could have informed him better.

Without deigning to reply to any thing that had been advanced against the first part of his work, Mr. Paine in this proceeds with an air of insolent triumph, as if all the advocates

of revelation lay prostrate at his feet, whereas they are looking down upon him, and feel no emotions but those of pity for himself, and his deluded followers, *the blind led by the blind*.

There are, however, unbelievers more ignorant than Mr. Paine. M. Volney, Laquinio, and others in France, say that there never was such a person as Jesus Christ, and therefore, though they may have heard that there are such books as those of the New Testament, I conclude that they cannot have read them. Surely such ignorance as this does not mark the *Age of Reason*.

I have more than once observed that the disbelief of revelation makes the belief of the being of God of no practical use, and that it has, in France, led to speculative atheism. In a tract published at Paris in 1793, intitled *A Letter to a Sensible Woman*, is the following paragraph, p. 25.

“ Theism is an opinion respectable for the  
 “ genius, and the virtues, of men who have  
 “ embraced it” (referring, in a note to Socrates  
 and Rousseau) “ no less than for the advantage  
 “ which this first step towards reason, on  
 “ abandoning the prejudices of infancy, has  
 “ been of to mankind. But, after all, it is  
 “ but a first step, and no persons would stop  
 “ there, if they would frankly give way to the  
 “ impulse

“ impulse they have received. No person remains  
“ in this intermediate system but through want  
“ of reflection, timidity, passion, or obstinacy.  
“ Time, experience, and an impartial examina-  
“ tion of our ideas, will undeceive us. Voltaire,  
“ who was long the apostle of theism, professed  
“ to doubt towards the close of his life, and  
“ repented that he had been too confident.  
“ Many others have experienced the same.”

If, then, any person be in a state of mind in which he is shocked at the idea of absolute *atheism*, let him pause before he abandon *revelation*, and give way to what this writer calls *the first impulse*. But on no account let any obstruction be laid in the way of free enquiry. With the apostle (1 Thess. v. 2.) let us *prove all things, and hold fast* only that which shall appear to be *good*.

I might have given a curious counterpart to the hypotheses of the antient philosophers in those of the most distinguished of the modern unbelievers. For many of their opinions concerning the origin of the universe, its subsequent revolutions, and other subjects connected with religion and morals, are not less wild, incoherent, and absurd; as every theory must be that excludes the belief of a God, and a superintending providence. This undertaking, however, has been executed with equal truth and ability in a French  
work

work, entitled *Les Helviennes, ou Lettres Provinciales Philosophiques*, in five volumes, 12 mo. 1784. They are called *Provincial Letters* in imitation of those of that title by the famous Pascal, in which he exposed the absurdities of the principles of the Jesuits, a work of genuine humour, to which this is, in many respects, not inferior. It is therefore adapted to afford equal entertainment and instruction.

From this excellent work it will be evident that the rejection of revealed religion will be attended with all that dissoluteness of morals for which the antient heathens were remarkable, there being no vice for which some of the most eminent of modern philosophical unbelievers have not been advocates ; and therefore that, in an advanced state of society, human reason has never proved a sufficient barrier against vice. It will also be evident that a propensity to the unrestrained indulgence of all the passions has been the principal cause of the prevailing disposition to throw off the salutary restraints of religion.

Not only are the great Christian virtues of humility, the forgiveness of injuries, and the loving of enemies, excluded from the class of virtues, and a spirit of pride and revenge encouraged ; not only is all virtue reduced to mere self-love, the great end of human life represented to

to be the pursuit of pleasure in the lowest sense of the word, and suicide recommended when this object is no longer attainable ; but the very barrier between men and brutes has been thrown down by many eminent unbelievers.

All the antient legislators even among the heathens, considered the laws of *marriage* as the first step towards civilization, and the conjugal and parental relations as, what no doubt they are, the chief source of the sweets of social life. But many modern unbelievers openly plead not only for an unbounded liberty of divorce, but a community of women, and make very light of the vices most contrary to nature. What is this but reducing men even lower than the state of brutes? And what can we expect from the natural operation of these principles, but the prevalence of those vices, which the apostle in his second epistle to Timothy enumerates as a symptom of the approach of the *last times*, which are elsewhere described as exceedingly calamitous, 2 Tim. iii.

1. *This know, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, &c.* The apostle Peter also says, 2 Pet.

iii. 3. *Knowing this that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming, &c.*

Reflecting on these things, we may well say with the evangelists, after they had related our

Saviour's

Saviour's predictions concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, and the various signs of its approach, *Let him that readeth, understand,* Math. xxiv. 15. Mark xiii. 14.

Unbelievers often complain of the difference of opinion among Christians, but their own opinions, even on the subject of christianity are as various. The celebrated Mr. D'Alembert, in his *Letters to the late king of Prussia* (*Œuvres Posthumes*, tom. 14. p. 105.) says, “ It appears  
 “ evident to me, as it does to your majesty, that  
 “ christianity in its origin was nothing but pure  
 “ deism, that Jesus Christ, the author of it,  
 “ was only a kind of philosopher, the enemy of  
 “ superstition, of persecution, and of priests;  
 “ who preached benevolence and justice, and  
 “ reduced the whole law to the love of our  
 “ neighbour, and the worship of God in spirit  
 “ and in truth, and that afterwards, St. Paul,  
 “ then the fathers of the church, and lastly the  
 “ councils, unhappily supported by the sovereigns,  
 “ changed this religion. I therefore think it would  
 “ be doing great service to mankind to reduce  
 “ christianity to its primitive state, confining it  
 “ to preaching to the people the doctrine of a  
 “ God rewarding virtue, and punishing vice,  
 “ who abhors superstition, detests intolerance,  
 “ and who requires of men no other worship  
 “ than that of loving and assisting one another.”

The

The scheme of reducing christianity to its primitive state, is, no doubt, excellent, and this writer's idea of that state is not far from the truth. But his assertion that Jesus Christ taught *pure deism*, is altogether unfounded, If there be any truth in his history, he taught the doctrine of a *resurrection*, and supported it by miracles; and Paul was far from making any addition to the doctrine of his master. He had too many enemies among christians to have had that in his power. How christianity was corrupted afterwards is well known, and I have shewn the progress of it in my *History of the Corruptions of Christianity*.

Since the writing of this Preface, I have been favoured with a sight of the third volume of 'Asiatic Antiquities,' a work which promises to throw great light on the mythology, and early history, of several antient nations ; and one passage in it, containing a quotation from an antient Hindoo writer, perhaps nearly as old as Moses, is so curious in itself, and such a confirmation of one part of his history, that I am persuaded my readers will be pleased with the communication of it. The work is intitled *Padma-puran*, and the translation of it is by Sir William Jones. Though the narrative is in substance the same with that of Moses, they differ in so many circumstances, that it is evident the writers did not copy from one another.

“ To Satyavarman, that sovereign of the  
 “ whole earth, were born three sons, the eldest  
 “ Sherma, then Charma\*, and thirdly Jyapeti  
 “ by name. They were all men of good morals,  
 “ excellent in virtue, and virtuous deeds, skilled  
 “ in the use of weapons, to strike with, or to be  
 “ thrown, brave men, eager for victory in bat-  
 “ tle. But Satyavarman being continually de-  
 “ lighted with devout meditation, and seeing his  
 “ sons fit for dominion, laid upon them the bur-  
 “ den of government.

“ Whilst he remained honouring and satisfy-  
 “ ing the gods, and priests, and kine ; one day,  
 “ by the act of destiny, the king, having drank  
 “ mead, became senseless, and lay asleep naked.  
 “ Then was he seen by Charma, and by him  
 “ were his two brothers called. To whom he  
 “ said, “ What now has befallen. In what  
 “ state is this our sire ? By those two was he  
 “ hidden with clothes, and called to his senses  
 “ again and again.

“ Having recovered his intellect, and perfect-  
 “ ly knowing what had passed, he cursed Char-  
 “ ma, saying, Thou shalt be the servant of  
 “ servants, And since thou wast a laughter in  
 “ their presence, from laughter shalt thou acquire  
 “ a name. Then he gave to Sharma the wide  
 “ domain

\* Colonel Wilford observes, that in the vulgar dialects  
*Charma* is usually pronounced *Cham*, and *Sharma*, *Sham*.

“ domain on the south of the snowy mountain.  
 “ And to Jyapeti he gave all on the north of the  
 “ snowy mountain; but he, by the power of  
 “ religious contemplation, attained supreme  
 “ blifs.”

Sir William Jones had before advanced a conjecture that the *Afgbans* might be of Hebrew extraction, and part of the ten tribes that were carried into captivity by the Assyrians. In his ‘Anniversary discourse,’ prefixed to this volume, he says, p. 6. “There is solid ground for believing that the Afghans are descended from the Jews, because they sometimes in confidence avow that unpopular origin, which in general they sedulously conceal, and which other muselmens perpetually assert; because *Hazaret*, which appears to be the *Afereth* of Esdras, is one of their territories, and principally because their language is evidently a dialect of the scriptural Chaldaic.”

Lastly, after reciting the unfavourable character given of the Jews by their enemies, and acceding to it, for which I am far from seeing sufficient reason, he says, p. 15, “They had the peculiar merit, among all the races of men under heaven, of preserving a rational and pure system of devotion, in the midst of a wild polytheism, inhuman or obscene rites, and a dark labyrinth of errors, produced by ignorance, and supported by interested fraud. Theological inquiries,” he adds, “are no part  
 “ of

“ of my present subject, but I cannot refrain  
 “ from adding, that the collection of tracts which  
 “ from their excellence, we call *the scriptures*,  
 “ contain, independently of a divine origin,  
 “ more true sublimity, more exquisite beauty,  
 “ purer morality, more important history, and  
 “ finer strains both of poetry and eloquence,  
 “ than could be collected within the same com-  
 “ pass from all other books that were ever com-  
 “ posed in any age, or in any idiom. The two  
 “ parts of which the scriptures consist, are con-  
 “ nected by a chain of compositions” (meaning  
 the prophetic books) “ which bear no resem-  
 “ blance in form or style to any that can be  
 “ produced from the stores of Grecian, Indian,  
 “ Persian, or even Arabian, learning. The  
 “ antiquity of these compositions no man doubts,  
 “ and the unstrained application of them to  
 “ events long subsequent to their publication, is  
 “ a solid ground of belief, that they were genuine  
 “ productions, and consequently inspired.”

When I compare the decided opinion of such  
 a man as Sir William Jones, in which all men  
 of learning will concur, with the confident as-  
 sertions of Mr. Paine, who says that the books of  
 scripture are but modern compositions, I think  
 of a man either really blind, or willfully shut-  
 ting his eyes, and declaring that *there is nothing*  
*to be seen*

## CONTENTS.

DISCOURSE.	PAGE.
I. <i>The Importance of Religion</i> -	1
II. <i>Of the superior Value of Revealed Religion</i>	27
III. <i>A View of Heathen Worship</i> - -	56
IV. <i>The same continued</i> - . -	86
V. <i>The excellence of the Mosaic Institutions</i>	114
VI. <i>The same continued</i> - - -	145
VII. <i>The Principles of the Heathen Philosophy compared with those of Revelation</i> - - -	176
VIII. <i>The same continued</i> - - -	201
XI. <i>The evidence of the Mosaic and Christian Religions</i> - -	237
X. <i>The same continued</i> - - -	269
XI. <i>The Proof of Revealed Religion from Prophecy</i> - -	313
XII. <i>Internal Evidence of Jesus being no Impostor</i> - -	356
XIII. <i>The moral Influence of Christian Principles</i> - - -	395

# ERRATA.

N. B. (b) signifies from the bottom of the page.

Page	line	for	read
41,	2,	an,	our
45,	7,	wherever,	whenever
51,	6 (b)	a million,	two millions
101,	1 (b)	made	made it
105,	7 (b)	act,	art
138,	14	hear,	bear
177,	9 (b)	those,	these
182,	13,	not,	not that
186,	13,	Democrates,	Democritus
232,	10,	for,	and for
243,	2 (b)	cannot,	could not
267,	2 (b)	for	to
271,	2,	shall	shall now
281,	1 (b)	chargeable,	charged
301,	7,	an,	the best
309,	2,	that,	that though
326,	1 (b)	Jerusalem,	Jeroboam
359,	5,	is,	his
363,	11 (b)	erected,	erect
370,	11,	lowdest,	lowest
402,	3,	good,	goods

A  
V I E W

OF THE

EVIDENCES OF REVEALED RELIGION.

---

DISCOURSE I.

*The Importance of Religion.*

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; but  
fools hate knowledge and instruction.

PROVERBS, i. 7.

BY the *fear of God* we may very well understand *religion* in general, and there can be no doubt but that by religion Solomon meant such principles of it as he held to be the best founded, or the revelation by Moses. And as I propose, in a series of discourses, to give a view of the evidences of revealed religion, I shall in this show that the subject is of *importance*, that the knowledge we receive by means of it is of

real value, tending to exalt the character, and add to the happiness of man. Indeed if this be not the use of religion, it would not be worth our while to make any enquiry into its evidences; because on that supposition, true or false, it would be an useless and insignificant thing. The question is the more deserving of an attentive consideration, as many, I imagine, most, unbelievers, maintain that religion is not merely an useless, but a hurtful thing, debasing the mind of man, and adding to the miseries of his existence, so that it is rendering him an essential service to free his mind from it.

Now, what is it that the friends of religion, say is so beneficial, and its adversaries so mischievous, to man? The principles of religion are acknowledged to consist in the belief of the being, the perfections, and providence of God here, and of a future state of retribution hereafter. The man who believes these things is said to have religion, and the man who disbelieves them, who thinks that there is no  
God,

God, no providence, or no future state, whatever he be in other respects, whether he be virtuous or vicious, cannot be said to have any *religion*, properly so called. Let us, then, consider the nature of these principles, and what effect they *must* have on those who seriously believe them. That principles, or opinions, of some kind or other, have real influence on the general character, and on the conduct and happiness of human life, cannot be denied. Man is a thinking being. All his actions proceed from some thought or design, and his actions and conduct are certainly of importance, issuing in a better or worse state of his circumstances. If the maxims he acts upon, and the objects of his pursuit, be just, and if his measures be well laid, he improves his condition; whereas if his maxims of conduct be false and fallacious, if the objects of his pursuit be unworthy of him, or his conduct be ill directed, he must expect to suffer in consequence.

It also cannot be denied that what is called *virtue*, or the right government of

the passions, adds to the dignity of man, and to the happiness both of individuals and of society; and religion certainly comes in aid of virtue. The man who follows the dictates of passion, and present inclination, without reflecting on the tendency and issue of his conduct, is sure to involve himself in difficulties. The unrestrained indulgence of the natural appetites, both shortens life, by introducing diseases and premature death, and makes a short life miserable; whereas moderation and discretion is the source of the truest and most lasting enjoyment. Manhood conducted by mere passion and inclination, without foresight of consequences, is only a protracted childhood; and what father is there who thinks it wise to indulge a *child* in all its varying humours. It would soon destroy itself. And equally destructive and ruinous would be the conduct of a *man* who should make no more use of his reason, but prefer his present gratification to future good, which is the general description of *vice*.

Could

Could the most intemperate of men have a clear foresight of all the disorders and wretchedness that will be the sure, or very probable, consequence of his conduct, with respect to his health and life, and also of the poverty and contempt which generally attends that mode of life, whatever might be his fondness for any species of sensual indulgence, he would certainly restrain himself. Also, how greedy soever any person might be of riches, could he foresee all the anxiety, and risk, attending a course of fraudulent practices, and the little enjoyment men have of dishonest gain, he would be content to be less rich and more happy. The ambition of Alexander, of Cæsar, or of Charles the twelfth of Sweden, would have been restrained, if they could have seen the whole progress and termination of their schemes.

1. Now religion, both extends the foresight of man, and puts him under the direction of a being whose foresight is greater than that of any man. When a  
man

man loses his natural parent, and guide, religion supplies him with another, superior in all respects to the former. By religion he puts himself under the direction of the Supreme Being, his true parent and best friend, on whose wisdom he may always rely, and in whose guidance he is sure to find happiness. Any rule of life and conduct drawn up by men like ourselves may be erroneous, being founded on imperfect views of things. The best parent may err in the management of his favourite child, whose welfare he has most at heart. But the great Being who made man can never err. The observance of his precepts must lead to happiness; and the full persuasion of this, which religion cannot fail to give us, puts an end to all doubt and uncertainty about what we ought to do, superseding our own judgment, and silencing all the evasions of passion and prejudice. And this alone is a circumstance of unspeakable advantage.

A person bent upon any particular gratification, however criminal, will make  
a thousand

a thousand apologies for the innocence, and perhaps the public utility, of it, which his own reason, biased, of course, by inclination, might never be able to see the fallacy of; which however the authority of an acknowledged master will silence at once. What has not the ingenuity of libertines pleaded in favour not only of fornication, but even of adultery; and by what specious names have those gross offences against the order, the decency, and peace of society been not only covered from ignominy, but even recommended, as indications of a man's spirit, as a source of real pleasure to some, and only an imaginary injury to others? How many persons have actually made their boast of actions of other kinds for which they deserved to be banished from all civilized society? How has murder itself, in the form of a duel, and in some countries in that of private assassination, been more than justified, from false notions of honour, the supposed dignity of revenge, and the meanness of submitting to insults and wrongs?

We

We see that men who have no belief in religion, actually commit these crimes, and indeed any other, without remorse. But this can never be the case where there is a principle of religion, where it is really believed that the authority of the Supreme Being has interposed, and expressly, as by a voice from heaven, absolutely forbidden the practices above mentioned, how ingeniously soever apologized for; saying to man, *Thou shalt not commit murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, &c. &c.*

2. Many persons, influenced by regard to their reputation, will refrain with sufficient care from such actions as they know would dishonour them in the opinion of their fellow creatures; but without a sense of religion they would feel little or no remorse in committing any crime with respect to which they had no suspicion of being detected and exposed. Religion is a guard against even secret vices. The belief that nothing is concealed from the eye of God, that he sees what man cannot see,

see, discerning even the thoughts and inclinations of the heart, will make a man as careful not to offend in private as in public. When the eye of man is not upon him, he well knows there *is* an eye that always sees him, and that though he might escape the censure of man, he has no means of escaping the righteous judgment of God.

Not only public censure, but other punishments, often fail to be inflicted on the guilty in this world. A man, therefore, who has no belief in another, may be tempted to risk a great deal with a reasonable prospect of impunity. For of the many crimes that are committed in human society, only a few are actually punished. But this avails nothing to a believer in religion, and a future state. He knows that there is a day coming in which God will judge the world in righteousness, and that no vice, though undetected, and unpunished, here, will escape animadversion and punishment hereafter.

Many offenders escape punishment in this world by means of their power, as well as their address. The rich and the great have, in too many cases, little to fear from the most flagrant violations of justice with respect to the poor, who are without money and without friends; and the kings and tyrants of the earth, to gratify their revenge, their lust of power, or mere caprice, ravage whole nations, and introduce an incalculable mass of misery among their fellow-creatures, without the most distant apprehensions of suffering in their own persons in consequence of it. But all this ends with the present scene. In the future the greatest monarchs will appear on a footing with the meanest of rational beings. No wealth or power will be of any avail then, and the knowledge of this may well be supposed to restrain men from those violences and oppressions of which they now are the authors. Thus is religion a powerful auxiliary of virtue, and thereby contributes to the good order and peace of society, as well as to the regulation

regulation of the private passions, and the happiness of individuals.

3. Religion is of no less use with respect to the troubles of life, than the duties of it. That, with a great preponderance of happiness (which sufficiently proves the goodness of God) there is a considerable mixture of misery in the world, is what no person who is at all acquainted with it, will deny. We need not adopt the melancholy despairing language of Job, and say, *Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble*, or that *he is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards*; for this gives an idea of a preponderance of misery, as the proper and intended lot of man. But certainly there is in the world sickness as well as health, pain as well as pleasure, and on many accounts grief as well as joy. Industry is not always successful, marriages are not always happy, children are not always a blessing to their parents, and other connections in life, which are generally sources of pleasure, are not always so.

There

There are also many evils against which no human prudence can guard us, as famine from inclement seasons, and pestilential disorders, which we are as yet unable to investigate, or prevent. All countries are more or less subject to hurricanes, tempests, and earthquakes; and the happiest and longest life must terminate in death. It is in vain to say, with the Stoics, that what we suffer by these means are no evils, or that we do not feel them.

But when nature abandons us to grief and despair, religion steps in to our consolation, assuring us, that nothing can befall us, or others, without the will and appointment of God, our heavenly Father, and that whatever he wills is always wisest and best, whether, at the time, we can see it to be so or not. As the Psalmist says, *though clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.* Religion assures us that, if by means of the evils of life, God chastises us, it is with the affection of a parent, and always for our good.

We

We can then say, with the apostle, that *all things will be made to work together for good to them that love God*, that, in this case, *life or death, things prosperous, or things adverse*, are equally *ours*, and will terminate in our advantage. With this persuasion we may bear all the evils of life, numerous and heavy as they sometimes are, not only with patience and resignation, but even with satisfaction and pleasure, *rejoicing*, as the apostles did, *in all kinds of tribulation*.

4. But religion is found to be of the greatest value at the close of life, opening to us a better prospect than that on which we then shut our eyes. Without religion all that the greatest philosopher can pretend to is that he has had enough of life, and that he obeys the call of nature without reluctance. But even this, if he has really enjoyed life, is more than he can say with truth. If he has enjoyed life, it must be sweet to him, and consequently he cannot but wish to prolong or resume it. A good  
man

man may, in one sense, have had enough of life, and, from the fatigues and uniformity of it, be as it were weary of it; but it is only such weariness as is felt at the close of an active well spent day, when we wish for rest, but with the hope of rising with renewed vigour and activity, and with the prospect of greater enjoyment, in the morning. That morning to a christian is the resurrection to a new and better life. Of this nature gives us no hope; but religion the greatest certainty.

According to the principles of religion, this world is only the infancy of our being. This life is only a school, in which we are training up for a better and immortal life, and all the events and discipline of it are calculated to prepare us for entering with advantage upon it; so that a good man, with the faith and hope of a christian, can bid adieu to this world not only with tranquility, but with satisfaction and triumph; singing the triumphant song, *O death where is thy sting, O grave where is thy victory.*

When

When christians lose their friends and relations by death, they do not grieve as the heathen who have no hope; but commit them with confidence to the hands of their merciful creator, whose views in calling them into being were not confined to this present life. He believes that this his separation from his virtuous friends is but for a time, and a short time, and he has no doubt of meeting them again, and in more favourable circumstances for enjoying their society than ever. There the affectionate parent will meet his beloved children, and children their parents, not worn down by affliction, disease, or hard labour, incapable of enjoyment, which is often the case in this world, but with all their faculties in full vigour, and superior to what ever they were before; every thing valuable and amiable in them improved, and their imperfections done away; so that their society, which we shall never lose again, will be more desirable than ever. Compared with this solid ground of consolation under the troubles

bles of life, and the fears of death, what has mere reason or philosophy to offer?

5. And it is a particular recommendation of religion, that both its teachings and consolations require no acuteness of intellect. They are level to the understandings of all men. As to the precepts of religion, they are thus summed up by the prophet, *What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.* In this short compass are comprized all the great duties of religion, and surely nothing can be more intelligible.

As to the consolations of religion, they are addressed to the common feelings and principles of human nature, such as men act upon every day. It is the expectation of distant good as a balance to present evil. Religion does not require men to give up their ease, their fortunes, or their lives, for nothing; but for a sufficient recompence. *Thou shalt be recompenced* said our Saviour, *at the resurrection of the just.* All that is requisite is a stretch of thought,  
and

and a comprehension of mind, which shall enable men to contemplate a thing certainly future, as if it was present: and by this means give it its proper value in comparison with things present, which, in consequence of being so, are possessed of an undue advantage over them. But what things that are future lose in this respect, is balanced by their real magnitude, and importance. *The things that are seen*, says the apostle (2 Cor. iv. 18) *are temporal, but the things that are unseen are eternal*. It is, therefore, the more easy, by a firm faith, and a steady contemplation, to give them their just degree of estimation, and to feel and act properly with respect to them; as thousands and millions have actually done, who have cheerfully abandoned every thing in life, and life itself, when the retaining of them was incompatible with their great prospects beyond the grave.

6. It is by habituating the mind to contemplate great and distant objects, that religion enlarges and ennobles the minds of men, advancing them farther beyond the

state of children, who are only affected by things immediately present to them, and from the great bulk of mankind, who do indeed look before them, but not far. They can sow and plant one year in hope of a return in the next, and they can expend their money in the purchase of goods with a view to sell them to advantage in a future and distant market. Also, when they labour under any disorder, they can take disgusting medicines in the hope of a cure. But this is far short of looking to a world beyond the grave, laying up treasure in heaven, making friends of the mammon of unrighteousness here, in order to be received into everlasting habitations hereafter. This is done by the help of religion, which by this means makes a man a superior kind of being to what he was before.

If *great thoughts*, as Lord Bacon says, *make great minds*, how much superior must be that man who is habitually employed in the contemplation of God, of a providence, and a future state, who sees the hand  
of

of God in every thing, and receives all the dispensations of providence with a contented and thankful heart, whose faith is not shaken by all the distress and calamity of which he is a witness, and all that himself, his friends, his country, or the world, may suffer, and who when he comes to die can look back with satisfaction, and forward with hope and joy, to the man who is either wholly ignorant of these great principles, or an unbeliever in them, whose views are bounded by what he sees in this life, and who can only say, *Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die.* To such persons life is indeed of little value. And it is no wonder that, under any particular pressure of trouble or disappointment, they throw it up, and put an end to their lives in despair.

7. Though I have represented the religious man as acting on plain and intelligible principles, and as overlooking present evils for the sake of future good, it by no means follows that he will be an interested character, and never love virtue for

for its own sake. It is by a rational self interest that the most disinterested characters are formed. This admits of an easy illustration from what we know concerning the love of money. The greatest miser does not begin with the love of money as an ultimate object, or for its own sake, but only for the sake of the advantages it can procure him. And yet we see that it is possible, in a course of time, for men to come to love money, and to employ all their powers, and all their time, in the acquisition of it, without giving the least attention to the use of it, and indeed without ever making any proper use of it at all; their ideas never going beyond the mere accumulation of it. Let any thing be pursued, though as a means, and in a course of time, it will come to be an end.

In like manner, let a man from any principle, habituate himself to respect the authority of God, to do good to others, and practise virtue in general, though at first with no other view than to his reward in a future state, and in time he will  
live

live virtuously, without giving any attention to his ultimate interest in it; and in this progress he will necessarily become as disinterestedly virtuous as it is possible, in the nature of things, for a man to be. He may begin with the mere *fear* of God, or a dread of his displeasure, but at length he will be actuated by the purest *love*, and an entire devotedness to his will, as such. He may begin with doing kind offices to others from any motive sufficient to produce the external action, but at length he will come with the apostle, *to love with a pure heart fervently*, taking the greatest pleasure in doing kind offices, without any idea, or expectation, of a return. He may at first abstain from sensual indulgence from a persuasion of what he may ultimately suffer in consequence of it, but in time he will have greater satisfaction in moderation than he ever had in excess, and he will readily and cheerfully do whatever he apprehends to be *right*, without asking *why*. The dictates of conscience will be with him a supreme rule of action.

This

This is that truly great and sublime character to which religion, and religion alone, can raise a man. Without the principles of religion, without *the fear of God*, which Solomon justly calls *the beginning of wisdom*, he wants the first necessary step in this progress. There must be a belief in the being and providence of God, and in a life of retribution to come, to give a man that comprehensive view of things, which alone can lead him to overlook temporary gratifications, and give him that due command of his passions which is essential to rational life. He must first look beyond the things that are seen, and temporal, to things unseen and eternal, or he might never see sufficient reason for the practice of those virtues which do not bring an immediate recompence. He would never respect the authority of God, unless he had a belief in his being and providence. All his works would be done to be seen of men; and if the only reward of virtue was in another world, which he believed to have no existence,

existence, he would have no sufficient reason to exercise it at all.

But having this *faith*, the foundation of right conduct, the superstructure is easily raised upon it. Possessed of this first principle, a seed is sown, which cannot fail in time to produce the noble and full grown plant, the excellent character above described. If the mind be thoroughly impressed with the fear of God, 'the two great principles, which comprise the whole of the moral law, the love of God, and of our neighbour, will in due time appear, and produce all *the fruits of righteousness*, without the least view to any reward whatever; and on this account will be intitled to, and will assuredly find, the greatest. This is to be most truly god-like, and the necessary consequence of being *like God*, of being *perfect* (or approaching as near to it as may be) as *God is perfect*, which our Saviour requires and encourages us to be, must be accompanied with a degree of happiness approaching the divine.

Such

Such being the obvious use and substantial value of religion, with respect to the conduct of life, the troubles we are exposed to in it, and at the hour of death, and to form the most exalted of human characters, it certainly behoves us to examine the evidence of it, and to do this not superficially, but with the greatest attention, as a question in the decision of which we are all most deeply interested. I may add that a virtuous and good man cannot but wish that the principles of religion may appear to be well founded, because it is his interest that they should be so; and if there be this bias on our minds in this enquiry, it is a reasonable and honourable bias, such as no person need be ashamed to avow.

At the same time, the greater is the object proposed to us, the more scrupulous we shall naturally be in our enquiries concerning it. When the apostles were first informed of the resurrection of their beloved master, it is said by the historian, that

that *they did not believe through joy*; and it was not without the most irresistible evidence, that of their *senses*, that they were at length satisfied with respect to it. Let us act the same part, and not receive a pleasing tale merely because it is pleasing to us, but strictly examine the evidence of it; and this is what I propose to lay before you, with the greatest plainness, without concealing any difficulties that appear to me to be worthy of much notice. Christ and the apostles always appealed to the understanding of their hearers, and it can only be a spurious kind of *religion* that disclaims the use of *reason*, that faculty by which alone we are capable of religion, and by which alone we are able to distinguish true religion from false, and that which is genuine, from the foreign and heterogeneous matter that has been added to it.



## DISCOURSE II.

### *Of the superior Value of Revealed Religion.*

---

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.

MICAH, vi. 8.

PROPOSING to deliver a series of Discourses on the evidences of revealed religion, I have begun with shewing the real value of *religion in general*, consisting in a belief of the being and providence of God, and of a future state of retribution. Taking it, therefore, for granted, that this faith is of real value to men, both as individuals and as members of society, I shall now endeavour to shew that the plan of *communicating* this knowledge by occasional interpositions of the Supreme Being

ing is, in several respects, preferable to that which unbelievers boast of as superior to it, viz. the gradual acquisition of it by the mere use of reason.

But I would previously observe that, provided the great *end* be gained, viz. the improvement of the human character by the attainment of such knowledge, and the forming of such habits, as will qualify men to be most happy in themselves, and dispose them to communicate the most happiness to others (which is the great object with God, the common parent of us all) the *means* are of no farther value. That scheme, or system, whatever it be, which best promotes this great end, is, for that reason the best; and if the two schemes be equally adapted to gain the same end, they are exactly of equal value.

Religion itself is only a means, or instrument, to make men virtuous, and thereby happy, in such a manner as rational beings are alone capable of being made happy: and the different kinds,  
forms,

forms, rites, or exercises, of religion are of no value but as they tend to make men religious, inspiring them with the fear of God, and a disposition conscientiously to observe whatever he is supposed to require of them. This great truth, which we ought ever to bear in mind, is clearly expressed in my text, *What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God*, i. e. to entertain just sentiments, and observe a right conduct, with respect to God and man; and every thing that God has *shewed* us, whether by the light of nature, or by occasional interpositions, has no other object than this. *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good*, what tends to make him virtuous and happy.

Let no person, therefore, value himself on his religion as such, be the principles of it ever so true, his knowlegde of it ever so exact, and his faith in it ever so firm. He is thereby only possessed of a means to a certain end, and if that end be not attained, he is so far from being a  
gainer

gainer by being possessed of the means that he is highly culpable for having such an instrument, and making no proper use of it. For *better*, as the apostle says, (2. Pet. ii. 21.) *would it be never to have known the way of righteousness than, after having known it, to depart from it, i. e. by living a vicious life.* Also, according to our Saviour's most solemn declarations, whatever may have been a man's relation to himself, even though he may have worked miracles in his name, if he be a *worker of iniquity* he will at the last day disclaim all knowledge of him, and order him to depart from him.

As the improvement of the human character in virtuous principles and habits is the end of all religion, we must judge of the preferableness of *natural*, or *revealed* religion by their superior tendency to effect this great end. But, indeed, so little of *religion* properly so called have men ever derived from the light of nature, and so little are those who reject revelation really influenced by any religious principle, that  
the

the true state of the question, in fact, is whether it be better for man to have the religion that is taught in the scriptures, or none at all. They who reject revelation may not absolutely, and in words reject the belief of a God, and of a providence (though we see in the example of the French philosophers, and many others, that this is generally the case) they are not influenced by that belief. Nor can we wonder at this, when they certainly have not, in fact, any expectation of a future state, which, as I shall shew, was never taught to any useful purpose but by revelation.

*Religion* implies the belief of the being and providence of God, and such a respect for the will of God, as will effectually controul a man's natural inclinations and direct his conduct, restraining him from irregularities to which he is naturally prone, and exciting him to actions to which he is naturally averse. But as men in general are governed either by strong natural appetites, or a view to their interest,

terest, it cannot be expected that *virtue alone*, without any hope of future reward or punishment, can have such charms for them, that they will abandon their pleasure, their ease, or their advantage, for the pure love of it. Supposing that men might arrive at a knowledge of the will of God with respect to their conduct in life, they would not feel any sufficient *obligation* to conform to it, without the great sanction of future rewards and punishments. Mere authority, as that of a parent, or of a magistrate, is little or nothing without the power of rewarding and punishing. Nothing, therefore, but a firm belief in a future state of retribution, can be expected to restrain men from giving into those indulgences to which they have a strong propensity.

1. With respect to every article of religion, the light of nature is far from being sufficiently clear and distinct, so as to be inferred with certainty by the most intelligent of men. With respect to what is most essential to human happiness, the wisest of  
men

men do not appear to have been, in fact, superior to the bulk, having in a variety of respects, laid down the most erroneous rules for the conduct of men. Plain as the most important maxims of morality are, there is not one of them, but what the most enlightened not only of the ancient philosophers, but of modern unbelievers, have controverted. What we call *conscience*, and which we might expect to be a better guide in this respect, than even *reason*, is by no means the same uniform principle in all men. It is formed by various associations of ideas, depending on the circumstances of our education, so that things which absolutely shock some persons, are not felt as at all improper by others. There is, therefore, something wanted superior to the dictates of reason, or natural conscience, and this can only be *revealed religion*, or the authority of our maker, which must be obeyed without reasoning. Man will, no doubt, dispute even about the will of God, when it is most clearly revealed, as they do concerning  
the

the most exprefs laws that are ever made by men, but if this be done with refpect to the articulate voice of God, it will be done to a much greater extent; and with much more plaufibility, to the inarticulate voice of nature, which every perfon will interpret as he is previously inclined.

If when men are hurried on by paffion, or fwayed by intereft, they will tranfgrefs fuch pofitive and acknowledged commands, as *thou fhalt not commit adultery, thou fhalt not steal, &c.* as we fee that, in fact, they do, it will not, however, be without reluctance, and remorse; and therefore tranfgreffions will be lefs frequent, and lefs flagrant, and repentance and amendment may be more reafonably expected to follow. But where no fuch pofitive command is acknowledged to exift, and the voice of nature alone is to be confulted about the proper conduct of life, moft men will miftake their own inclination for the voice of nature, and confequently fin without reluctance or remorse. Of this it would be eafy to give inftances in the cleareft of  
all

all cases, but this would take up too much of our time, and something of this was mentioned in my last discourse.

2. Still less would men, by the mere light of nature, have ever attained to any satisfactory conclusion with respect to the ultimate design of the author of nature in the formation of man. I mean the prolongation of his existence beyond the grave. On this most interesting of all questions nature is altogether silent. Judging from appearances, as the brutes die, so does man; and all his faculties and powers die with him. That at death any things escapes, unaffected by this catastrophe, is a mere arbitrary supposition, unsupported by any appearance, or probability of any kind.

That the belief which the ancient Greeks and Romans had of a future life, imperfect, and of little value, as it was, was originally derived from revelation, but exceedingly corrupted by tradition, is pretty evident from this circumstance, that when they began to *speculate* on the subject,

subject, and examine the *reasons* they could produce for it, all serious belief in the doctrine soon vanished. With the Platonists, who made the most of this doctrine, it was only a curious speculation, of no real use in the conduct of life, such as it is with Jews and Christians. Indeed, the *reasons* which the Platonists gave for this doctrine, and which Plato puts into the mouth of Socrates, are such as could not possibly have any weight with thinking men. That on which he lays the greatest stress, is the doctrine of pre-existence, that the souls of men were originally without bodies, and afterwards confined in them as in a prison, and that death is the breaking of this prison. But where is the evidence of men having pre-existed? This doctrine of pre-existence we find most fully established in Egypt and the East, whence Plato and other Greeks derived it. With modern unbelievers it certainly has no weight.

It is well known that the first philosophers among the Greeks did not pretend

to

to discover any thing by their own reasoning. They only taught what they had learned of others, who had received the tenets that had been transmitted to them from early times, and that what they taught was delivered to their pupils on their sole *authority*, as what was not to be contradicted. This was the established custom of the Pythagorean school. Reasoning came into their schools afterwards, and with it the wildest theories on all subjects, as I shall shew in its proper place, and a total scepticism with respect to the doctrine of a future state of retribution, as a motive to virtue.

Supposing that it were possible by the mere light of nature to arrive at the belief of a future state, yet judging from present appearances, it could not be the future state announced in the Scriptures, a state in which virtue will find an ample recompence, and vice its just punishment, but only such a life as *this*, and in all other respects resembling the present; which is the belief of the North American Indians,

and

and most other barbarous nations. If because we dislike any thing in the present system, we entertain an idea that the inconvenience complained of will be removed in a future state, where is the evidence that, under the same powers, or principles, of nature, whatever they are, things *will* be ordered in a better manner? Is it possible to infer from what we see (and we have nothing else by which to guide our conjectures) that those evils which the author of nature has thought proper, for whatever reason, to introduce, or to permit, here, will not be continued there also? If we say that it is not agreeable to *justice* that good and bad men should be treated as they are here, where is the evidence, from any present appearances, that the author of nature *intended* that they should ever be treated otherwise? Left to the light of nature, we could only reason from what we know, and this would lead us to expect that, if there be any life after death, it will be similar to the present. It is only from the express assurance of the  
author

author of nature, communicated by revelation, that we believe the future state will be better than the present, that in it the righteous will be fully rewarded, and the wicked punished. It is evident, therefore, that when we abandon revelation, we give up all *religion* properly so called, all that can have any salutary influence on the hearts and lives of men.

3. With respect to *men*, there is certainly a great advantage in precepts and commands, promises and threatenings being delivered in *words*, proceeding as from a real person, it being by this means that instructions are delivered with the greatest distinctness. It may indeed, be said, and with truth, that nature speaks to men, and that nature teaches, and nature threatens, but besides that the information is more indistinctly communicated, it is in a manner less apt to make an impression, and command respect. It is, therefore, of great advantage that the attention of men be directed to something beyond mere nature, viz. to the author and lord  
of

of nature, and that he be considered not as an allegorical personage, but a real intelligent Being, capable of communicating his will in words, and such signs as men are daily accustomed to, and apt to be impressed by.

Besides, all men feel an unavoidable propensity to *address* themselves to the Being on whom they depend; and without some mode of intercourse with him, they would soon lose sight of him, as a child would of his father, if he never saw him, and had no access to him. Without an idea of God different from what we could collect from the contemplation of nature, there would be no such thing as *prayer*. Indeed, unbelievers in revelation ridicule the idea of prayer as unnatural and absurd, though all nations, without exception, have had recourse to it; which is a clear proof that it is natural, as every thing that is universal must be.

Authority is best supported by a mixture of *affection*, but there cannot be any thing of *this* except towards a being resembling

sembling other beings which have been the object of an affection, and which have engaged our confidence. And in revelation, but by no means in nature, the Supreme Being appears to us in the familiar character of a parent, a 'person with whom we can have communication, who may be conceived to be always present with us, who encourages us to address ourselves to him, who always hears us, and sometimes answers us. By this means God easily becomes the object of real affection, and attachment. Here we find a solid foundation for *love* and *fear*, which are the chief motives for men's actions. With believers in revelation, this sometimes degenerates into an absurd enthusiasm, by which the Divine Being becomes the object of a fond and improper affection.

We may say that it is beneath the Supreme Being, and unworthy of him, to have this familiar intercourse with men; but it is of great importance to our virtue and happiness; and to a being of perfect benevolence, and who knows, the frame  
that

that he has given us, nothing will appear beneath him that is so well adapted to answer his benevolent purpose respecting us. Nor, indeed, would the most absolute prince, if he really wished to appear as the father and friend of his people, think any thing beneath him that tended to promote the happiness of his subjects.

It is said by modern unbelievers, that the expectation of such a being as the great author of nature condescending to act this humble part is unreasonable, and that miracles of all kinds, the only evidence of it, are necessarily incredible. I answer that the assertion betrays a great unacquaintedness with human nature, and the history of man. For it has been the belief of all nations, and all ages, that the highest beings of whom they had any idea have acted this very part. Socrates himself expressed an earnest wish for a divine instructor. This expectation and belief is, therefore, by no means unnatural, and there must be something in human nature that leads to it.

If

If we look to the last, and therefore what we may suppose to be the most improved state of heathen philosophy, that of the later Platonists, or Eclectics, to which the emperor Julian (whose superior good sense is so much the boast of modern unbelievers) attached himself, we shall find them in this very respect the most superstitious, the most enthusiastic, and the most credulous of men. Far from supposing that men had no intercourse with the supreme being, they expected to unite themselves to him by contemplation, and corporeal mortification. “ The piety of  
“ Proclus, one of the most celebrated of  
“ them, is highly extolled by his biogra-  
“ pher. He spent whole days and nights  
“ in repeating prayers and hymns, that  
“ he might prepare himself for an imme-  
“ diate intercourse with the gods. He  
“ observed with great solemnity the new  
“ moons, and all public festivals, and on  
“ these occasions imagined that he con-  
“ versed with superior beings, and was  
“ able by his sacrifices, prayers, and hymns,  
to

“ to expel diseases, to command rain,  
 “ to stop earthquakes, and to perform  
 “ other similar miracles.” Whether,  
 therefore, we look to the vulgar, or the  
 philosophers among the ancients, we shall  
 find the idea of divine communications and  
 of miracles, to have been natural to man.  
 These philosophers did not deny the mira-  
 cles of Christ, but maintained that he  
 wrought them by the same magical or  
 theurgic powers, as they were termed,  
 which they themselves possessed. See En-  
 field’s History of Philosophy, Vol. i.  
 p. 83, 92.

4. They who give so decided a prefer-  
 ence to the light of nature, the appear-  
 ances of which are uniform, to that of  
 revelation, which supposes an occasional  
 departure from the usual course of nature,  
 betray their ignorance of the nature of  
 man, by whom all *uniform appearances* are  
 apt to be disregarded, but who never fail  
 to be struck by what is *unusual*. Does  
 not every human being see the regular ri-  
 sing and setting of the sun, the periodical  
 returns

returns of summer and winter, seed time and harvest, but how few ever think of the wisdom or benevolence of these appointments? They content themselves with observing *effects*, and directing their conduct by them, without ever reflecting on the *cause*. But wherever any thing *unusual* happens, when comets are seen, or eclipses of the sun or moon take place, their attention is forcibly arrested; and after reflecting on the cause of the extraordinary appearances, they may be induced to give some attention to those that are constant. I shall illustrate this by a case which I have put on a former occasion.

Let a person unacquainted with clocks, watches, and other machines, be introduced into a room containing many of them, all in regular motion. He sees no maker of these machines, and knows nothing of their internal structure; and as he sees them all to move with perfect regularity, he may say, on the principles of the atheistical system, that they are *automata*, or self-moving machines; and so  
long

long as all these machines continue in regular motion, and he knows nothing of the making of them, or the winding of them up, this theory may appear plausible.

But let us suppose that, coming into this room again and again, and, always attending to the machines, he shall find one of them much out of order, and that at length its motion shall intirely cease ; but that after continuing in this state some time, he shall again find it in perfect order, moving as regularly as ever. Will he not then conclude that some person, whom he has not seen, but probably the maker of the machines, had been in the room in his absence? The restoration of motion to the disordered machine would impress his mind with the idea of a *maker* of them in a much more forcible manner than his observing the regular construction, and uniform motion of them. It must convince him of the existence of some person capable of *regulating*, and therefore probably of *making* these machines,

machines, whether he should ever see this person or not.

Thus do miracles prove the existence of a God in a shorter and more satisfactory manner than the observation of the uninterrupted course of nature. If there be a Being who can *controul* the course of nature, there must be one who originally *established it*, in whatever difficulty we may still be left with respect to his nature, and the manner of his existence.

Why men should be struck with unusual appearances it is not my business to explain, though it would not be difficult to do it, the fact of their *being so* is sufficient to my purpose. And therefore a person acquainted with human nature, and this property of it, would not neglect to avail himself of it when he wished to engage the attention of men, for the purpose of their instruction and improvement. Why then should we think it unnatural, or improper, in the divine Being, who, as the maker of men, best knows what they are, and in what way to apply to them?

Let

Let no one then say that occasional interpositions, or miraculous appearances, are an unnatural, or improper mode of instructing mankind, when it is in a manner necessary to draw their attention to a superior being, as a foundation for their intercourse with him.

4. No less are they mistaken who imagine that the *evidences* of revealed religion have more of difficulty in them than those of natural religion, by which we mean the arguments from nature for the being, perfections, and providence of God. On the contrary, far greater difficulties occur with respect to *these*, than with respect to the others, and all that can be said is, that great difficulties must give way to greater. Far am I from supposing that the evidence for the being of a God, is not *demonstrative*, since marks of design, with which the world abounds, necessarily imply a designing or intelligent cause. But notwithstanding this, we can never fully satisfy ourselves with respect to the objection of the atheist, that if the universe

universe require a cause, this cause must require another; and if the author of nature, or the being we call *God*, exist without a cause, so may the universe itself.

All that we can say in answer to this, is that, whatever difficulty we may labour under with respect to this subject, which will always be above our comprehension, the actual existence of a visible world, and of marks of design in it, cannot be denied, and therefore, whether we be able to proceed any farther or not, we *must* acknowledge a designing cause. Otherwise we might say that a house had no architect, or a child no father. If the eye of a man require no designing cause, neither would a telescope, which is an instrument of a similar nature, evidently adapted to answer a similar purpose. And at this supposition every mind would revolt.

More and greater difficulties occur when we proceed to the consideration of the unity, the omnipresence, the constant agency, and what is of more consequence

still, the *benevolence* of the Supreme Being, on the principles of the light of nature. So forcibly were the minds of men in the early ages, impressed with a view of the *evils* which abound in the world, and so inconsistent did they conceive them to be with the designs of a benevolent author, that they supposed there was an original *principle of evil*, independant of that of good. And they who supposed there was a multiplicity of deities (to which they were led by the extent and variety they observed in the works of nature) imagined some of them to be of a benevolent, and others of a malevolent disposition. That the author of nature is one, that he is simply, invariably, and infinitely good, and that all the evils we see and experience, are calculated to promote good, are great and sublime truths, which we derive from revelation only, though, on a strict examination, they appear not to be inconsistent with the appearances in nature.

On the other hand, the evidences of revelation are level to every capacity. That it is the author of nature who interposes must be evident from every interruption of the usual course of it. For no other than he who established the laws of nature can controul them; and though there may be some difficulty in distinguishing some preternatural appearances from such as are merely unusual, this cannot be the case with respect to numberless others. If it was a fact that the Israelites walked through the Red Sea, and the river Jordan, if all the first-born of the Egyptians, and the first-born only, of man and beast, died in one night, and that announced before-hand; if an articulate voice was actually heard to pronounce the ten commandments from mount Sinai, so as to be heard by a million of people, there could be no doubt of a divine interposition in any of the cases. And the same may be said of numberless other facts in the scripture history. If the *facts* be ascertained, there can be no doubt concerning their *cause*.

Now,

Now, all facts may be ascertained by sufficient testimony, or that of a competent number of credible witnesses, i. e. of persons who were in circumstances not to be imposed upon themselves, and who had no apparent motive to impose upon others. This is fully equal to the evidence of a man's own senses. Nay, there are many persons who would distrust their own eyes and ears rather than those of other persons, who they thought were better judges than themselves.

Though single persons may be imposed upon in a variety of ways, or may take it into their heads, for reasons which it is not in the power of any man to investigate, to impose upon others, this can never be said to be the case with respect to thousands who believe, or attest, things evidently contrary to their interest, and previous inclinations. That great numbers of persons, and others in succession to them, all of whom had sufficient opportunity to investigate any particular fact, which required no other evidence than  
that

that of the senses, and who were interested in the investigation, their fortunes or their lives depending upon it, should persist in their attestation of it, would be a greater miracle, more contrary to what we know of human nature, than any fact contained in the scripture history.

As to the evidence of a future state, what are all the arguments derived from the light of nature compared to that which is furnished by the gospel, which is therefore justly said (2 Tim. i. 10.) to *bring life and immortality to light*? There we see a person commissioned by God, teaching the doctrine with the greatest plainness and emphasis, enforcing it by miracles, among which was the raising of several persons from a state of death to life, and, what was infinitely more, submitting to die himself in the most public and indisputable manner, and rising to life again at a fixed time. Had mankind in general been asked what evidence would satisfy them, they could not have demanded more.

Whatever

Whether therefore, we consider the precepts of religion, i. e. the rules of a virtuous and happy life, the authority requisite to enforce the observance of them, the motives by which they are enforced, or the evidence of their truth, revealed religion has unspeakably the advantage of natural; and therefore so far is the scheme of revelation from being improbable *a priori*, that it must appear such as a wise and good Being, who was acquainted with human nature, and wished to engage the attention of men, and impress their minds with sentiments of reverence of himself, and respect for such laws as were calculated to promote their greatest happiness, would adopt in preference to any other; being the best adapted to gain his end. It was of the greatest importance to mankind to be made acquainted with those moral principles and rules of conduct on which their happiness depended, and which they would never have discovered of themselves, to have their attention drawn to them in the  
most

most forcible manner, and to have the most satisfactory evidence of their truth; and this is what we find in revelation, and in revelation only. It is therefore as the apostle justly calls it (1 Cor. i. 24) *the wisdom and the power of God*, though objected to, and ridiculed, by light and superficial men.

## DISCOURSE III.

### *A View of Heathen Worship.*

---

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness. Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invifible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly feen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead, fo that they are without excuse. Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolifh heart was darkened. Profefling themfelves to be wife, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds and fourfooted beafts, and creeping things. Wherefore alfo God gave them up to uncleanness, through the lufts of their own hearts, to difhonour their own bodies between themfelves, who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worfhipped and ferved the creature more than the Creator, who is bleffed for ever. For this caufe God gave them up to vile affections.

ROMANS, i. 18---26.

IN order to give you a juft idea of the real value of revelation, it is neceffary that I lay before you the ftate of things with refpect to *religion* in the heathen world,

world, especially in the early ages of mankind, about the time of Moses; that when I come to give you a view of his institutions, the difference may be the more striking. Very few, I am persuaded, of the modern unbelievers have a just knowledge of this subject. If they had, it would, I hope, be impossible for them to treat the religion of the Hebrews with so much contempt. Not only the extreme ignorance, but the great depravity, of mankind in a state of heathenism, would not be credible at this day, if there did not exist a superfluity of the most authentic documents of it, so that the facts cannot be denied without the extreme of effrontery. This, however, we find in Voltaire, who says that “ the religion of the  
“ heathens consisted in nothing but *mora-*  
“ *lity*, and festivals; morality” which he says “ is common to all men, and *festivals*  
“ which were no more than times of re-  
“ joicing, and could not be of prejudice to  
“ mankind.” The particulars which I shall be obliged to mention, and which could not

be unknown to this writer, though they are to many others, will shew how shamefully the truth is disguised in this representation. The religion of the heathens had nothing to do with morality, and their public festivals were almost without exception, scenes of the greatest riot and debauchery. Believing their gods to be cruel or sensual, there is no vice how detestable and unnatural soever, that did not find a place in the most solemn acts of their worship.

It is not necessary for me to give any account of the manner in which mankind fell into this deplorable state of depravity it being sufficient to shew that such *was* their state, and that it was evident, from the experience of ages, in which men made the most of their powers of reason, that they were not able to relieve themselves. *Why* the Supreme Being permitted the rise and progress of this species of evil, may be as inscrutable to us, as the permission of any other evil, natural or moral, none of which it must be acknowledged, could have taken place without  
his

his knowledge and permission, and all of which, and this among the rest, we have reason to believe will lead to good, and hereafter appear to have done so. In the mean time it is well worth our while to contemplate the magnitude of the evil, and the goodness of God in the cure of it, in what, no doubt, was the proper time, and in the most proper and effectual manner.

That the great principles of religion, concerning the being and providence of God, and a future state of existence, were communicated by God to the first parents of mankind, is probable from several circumstances. Obscure traces of this knowledge are found in all antient nations, and the farther we go back into antiquity, the purer we find their religion to be. But in process of time it became more and more corrupted, till, instead of coming in aid of virtue, it was itself, a great source of the corruption of morals, as the progress is well described in my text.

The

The world ever bore sufficient marks of its being the production of an omnipotent and good Being, a lover of virtue, and a hater of vice ; but men, contemplating, as we may suppose, the immense variety, and seeming contrariety, of the works of creation, could not believe that the whole was under the direction of *one being* : And being left to their own imaginations, and judging of other intelligent beings by what they observed in themselves, and others, they concluded that there must be a *multiplicity of beings*, concerned in the government of the world, and the direction of human affairs, some well and others ill disposed towards them. For it required more knowledge and comprehension of mind than they had attained, to perceive that all the evils with which the world abounds were calculated to promote good. They thought they saw in them the effects of malice, and ill will, at least of caprice, and their conduct naturally corresponded to their ideas.

The

The mind of man is never satisfied without looking for the *causes* of events, especially those that take place only occasionally, and to appearance, irregularly, and still more if they be favourable or unfavourable to themselves, because they hope by this means to be able to avoid the one, and secure the other. And not being able to discover the true causes, they must, of course, acquiesce in what they *imagine* to be the true causes. It appears from all history that, in the most early ages, mankind in general ascribed every thing that affected them to the influences of the heavenly bodies, the sun, moon, stars, and planets, and to an intelligent principle which they supposed to reside in them. For heat and cold, storms and rain, often coming unexpectedly, they naturally enough imagined that they did not come without design, and that, if these heavenly agents had been so disposed, their influences would have been always favourable. To these objects therefore, they, of course, directed all their regards, and their worship.

They

They also came to suppose that there was an intelligent principle in the earth, and in the several parts of it, as the air, the sea, the rivers, mountains, forests, &c. so that they soon became possessed of a great multiplicity of objects of worship, whose favour they thought it of importance to gain, and whose displeasure they wished to deprecate.

Having got the idea of different superior intelligences, whether subordinate to the supreme Being or not, they soon lost sight of the supreme Being himself, and gave their whole attention to those inferior beings, whom they supposed to be the immediate authors of the good and evil that befel them. This was on the same natural principle that tenants look to the steward, with whom they transact all their business, and not to the proprietor of the land, with whom they have nothing to do.

We have this farther evidence from fact, that this practice was natural. When Christians got the idea of Jesus Christ,

Christ, of saints and angels being proper objects of worship, they generally fell into the habit of looking no higher, neglecting the worship of God; and had it not been for the prayers addressed to him in the scriptures and in the antient liturgies, he would, I doubt not, have been as much overlooked and forgotten, as if no such being had existed.

But on whatever principle this took place, the fact cannot be denied, and the number of gods kept increasing, instead of diminishing by time and reflection. Orpheus reckoned only as many gods as there were days in the year, but in the time of Hesiod, the Greeks had no less than thirty thousand divinities. The Romans in the time of Varro had three hundred Jupiters, that is the same God was worshipped under so many different titles, under which he was supposed to possess different powers, and some have reckoned no less than two hundred and eighty thousand gods.

The Egyptians, from whom the Greeks originally received their religion, imagined that particular animals were the favourites of particular deities, and communicated their powers to them. At least, they considered their several qualities as symbols of divine power, and at length paid a proper worship to them. Plutarch expressly says, that “the greater part of the Egyptians worshipped the animals themselves,” which he said “led some to the most extravagant superstition, and precipitated others into atheism.” Cotta, in Cicero, says that “though there have been many instances of temples plundered, and the images of the gods carried away, by the Romans, it had never been heard that a crocodile, an ibis, or a cat, had been ill treated by the Egyptians,” so far did they carry their superstitious respect for them.

Another source of the multiplication of deities was an idea that particular superior beings presided over particular circumstances

cumstances relating to men, and their affairs, so that they had gods corresponding to many abstract ideas. Thus the Romans had temples and altars dedicated to the *fever*, and ill *fortune*, and, the Athenians to *contumely* and *impudence*. At length, after deifying all the parts of nature, and many of the qualities and properties of things, they deified particular *men*, and worshipped them after their death. Nay the Romans, in the time of the emperors, carried their adulation so far as to pay divine honours to some of them, and those the very worst of them, while they were alive.

The heavenly bodies being sometimes invisible, the heathens had recourse to some symbols of their power, or some visible object, to which they imagined their powers were in some way or other attached, and to which they could always have recourse. These were at first *pillars*, or only large stones, consecrated in certain positions of those heavenly bodies, which they wanted to represent. Refining upon this, they afterwards made use of the forms of men  
and

and animals for that purpose. The forms of some of their deities being altogether unknown, they made use of such figures as they conceived to be proper symbols of their powers. The idols of the Egyptians had the heads of particular animals, as that of a dog, on the body, or part of the body of a man. At Rome the god Janus had two faces, and the idols of Indostan have a great number of arms, &c. Hence Varro, speaking of these images says, that “ if they had life, and any person should “ meet them unexpectedly, they would “ pass for monsters.” He also censures the cruel and lascivious rites that were introduced into the worship of several of their gods, especially of Cybele; yet he says that “ a wise man will observe all “ these things, not as acceptable to the “ gods, but as commanded by the laws,” and speaking of the “ ignoble rabble” as he calls them “ of the gods,” which, he says, “ the superstition of ages has heaped “ together,” he adds, “ we so adore “ them, as to remember that this worship

“ship is rather matter of custom, than  
“founded on nature and truth.” So far  
were the heathen philosophers, who were  
sensible of the absurdity and pernicious ten-  
dency of this worship, from being dispos-  
ed to reform it. It was a maxim with  
them, as with the generality of modern  
unbelievers, to think with the wise, and  
act with the vulgar. But had Christ and  
his apostles acted on this principle, we  
should now have been worshipping Thor  
and Woden, and imbruing their altars  
with human blood.

The most horrid of all the rites of the  
heathen religion was that of *human sacrifices*,  
which, however, were universal in ancient  
times, and especially among the Canaanites,  
and in the countries that bordered upon  
Palestine, as, indeed, the history of the Car-  
thaginians, who were descended from the  
Tyrians, abundantly proves.

We shall not much wonder at the in-  
troduction of this rite, shocking as it is to  
humanity, when we consider the destruc-  
tion of life, and other evils occasionally  
produced

produced by natural causes, as by heat, drought, lightning, earthquakes, &c. These the heathens, of course, ascribed to the agency of their gods. They would, therefore, imagine that they were sometimes very angry, and that great sacrifices were necessary to appease them. Apprehensive, then, of greater evils, they willingly subjected themselves to those that were less.

In general, the heathens thought the sacrifice of slaves and captives would satisfy the blood thirsty appetites of their gods; but on particular occasions, fearful that this would not be deemed sufficient, they sacrificed the children of the most distinguished persons in the state, as those of their kings themselves. The Carthaginians, after some great disaster in war, sacrificed at one time three hundred young men of the first families in their commonwealth. In this the Israelites, during their apostacy from their own religion, imitated their heathen neighbours as we read, Psalm cvi. 37. *They sacrificed their sons and their daughters*

*daughters to demons, and shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan. Jer. vii. 31. They built the high places of Tophet which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire. They built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal. This place was called Tophet, from a Hebrew word which signifies a drum, or fistrum, instruments which made a loud noise, which the priests made use of to drown the cries of the victims, as it was the custom to burn them alive.*

By Baal was meant the sun, the principal object of worship in all antient nations; and as the heat of the sun is sometimes very destructive, it is no wonder that they supposed him to be actuated by the passion of anger. Lord Herbert observes that victims of less dignity were deemed sufficient for the inferior deities, but that to their highest god, the sun, human sacrifices, as the most valuable, were to be offered.

Human

Human sacrifices appear to have been universal in antient times. They were in use among the Egyptians till the reign of Amasis. They were never so common among the Greeks or Romans; yet with them they were in use on extraordinary occasions. Porphyry says that the Greeks were wont to sacrifice men when they went to war. Clemens Alexandrinus says that both Erechtheus king of Athens, and Marius the Roman general, sacrificed their own daughters. Plutarch, in his life of Themistocles, relates that three beautiful Persian women, richly habited and adorned, were, by the advice of the prophet Euphrantides, offered as sacrifices to Bacchus Omestes, as a vow for victory at the commencement of the Persian war; and though Themistocles was shocked at the inhumanity of it, the people with one voice, invoking Bacchus, and bringing the victims to the altar, compelled him to perform the sacrifice.

The same historian says that the Romans, in the beginning of a war with the  
Gauls,

Gauls, and in obedience to an oracle in the Sybilline books, buried alive a Gaulish man and a Gaulish woman, and also a Greek man and a Greek woman, in the ox market by way of sacrifice. Livy says that they repeated this sacrifice at the beginning of the second Punic war.

Human sacrifices were offered at Rome, says Porphyry, till the reign of Adrian, who ordered them to be abolished in most places. This writer, who lived in the time of Diocletian, mentions it as a thing well known, that in the city of Rome itself a man was wont to be sacrificed at the feast of Jupiter Latiaris. Lactantius, who wrote a little after this, says that the same was practised in his time. Human sacrifices were so numerous among the Gauls and Britons, that the Romans forbade the public exercise of their religion. According to Cæsar (*De Bello Gallico*, lib. 6. § 15) they sometimes made images of an immense size, constructed of wicker work, which they filled with men, and then burned them alive.

In

In later times we find human sacrifices as numerous among the Mexicans and Peruvians, who, of all the inhabitants of America, had arrived at the greatest degree of civilization, as in any of the antient nations. The most authentic record says that the Mexicans sacrificed annually twenty thousand men, and at the dedication of their great temple, not less than sixty or seventy thousand. If any person will only read with attention the history of this country by Clavigero, he will be convinced that such was the rooted attachment of that people to their religion in general, and this horrid rite in particular, that nothing but such a conquest of them as that by the Spaniards, would ever have put an end to that custom. His account of the state of facts will abundantly justify the conduct of divine providence in the utter extirmination of the inhabitants of Canaan. It was for the good of mankind that such nations should be extirpated from the face of the earth.

If

If any persons will say that the author of nature could not give a commission, which they think to have been so cruel and unjust, let them say whether the author of nature does not continually do things which they themselves must say are more cruel and unjust; as the promiscuous destruction of persons of all ages and characters by pestilence and famine, by hurricanes and earthquakes, as also by diseases and death, which are universal. Did not the author of nature clearly foresee these calamities, and therefore intend that they should take place? And where is the difference, in a moral view, between doing any thing by laws of his appointment, or by a special commission. The thing to be objected to is the ultimate event, not the means by which it was effected. In fact, they who make this objection, and others of a similar nature, first form to themselves an idea of the author of nature from their own imagination, and not from the observation of his works, which is the only method of forming a just  
idea

idea of any character, and then pronounce that such and such things as they wish to have been otherwise are incompatible with his character. Besides, the firmest believer in the divine benevolence (and justice, strictly considered, is only a modification and branch of benevolence) will say that any kind or degree of evil that may, directly or indirectly, be productive of a greater good, is compatible with it, and of this ultimate tendency of things God himself, and not man, is the judge. This conduct, however, is not to be imitated by man, on account of the imperfection of our knowledge. We must not *do evil that good may come*, though this is constantly done by the Divine Being, because we cannot tell whether the evil *will* be productive of good, whereas, he always knows the end from the very beginning, and therefore cannot be mistaken with respect to the final result.

Besides the horrid custom of human sacrifices, which were thought to be necessary to appease the wrath of some of the  
the

the heathen deities, they had other rites, which, though they did not terminate in death, were extremely painful. The priests of Baal, as we read, 1 Kings xviii. 28. *cut and flashed themselves with knives and lancets till the blood gushed out*, when they were desirous of getting a favourable answer from him. The same, according to Herodotus, was practised in the worship of Isis, an Egyptian deity, and of Bellona among the Romans. Also in the festivals of Cybele, called *the mother of the gods*, the priests, who were castrated, made hideous noises and howlings, and cut themselves till the blood gushed out. The worship of this goddess was introduced from the East to Rome. At a festival in Sparta boys were whipped with so much severity, on an altar of Diana (the priestesses attending to see that it was done in a proper manner) that they often died in consequence of it. When this was the case, and the boys had borne the torture with sufficient fortitude, they had the honour of a public funeral, as having died in the service of their

their country. This custom was instituted by Lycurgus, the great Spartan lawgiver, in exchange for the sacrifice of a man every year at the same altar, the oracle having only declared that the altar of that goddess must be sprinkled with human blood. There was also an altar of Bacchus in Arcadia, on which many young women were beaten with rods till they died.

The rites of heathen religions now or lately existing, are as cruel as those of any of the antients. In Indostan it is frequent, and deemed particularly meritorious, for widows to be burned alive with the bodies of their husbands, and their Faquirs voluntarily undergo such tortures as it is painful to read of. They will often continue so long in the most constrained postures, that their limbs are incapable of any motion; so that they remain so until they die, their wants supplied, and their prayers requested, by great numbers of persons. Sometimes, having strong iron hooks, thrust through the skin of their backs, they get themselves to be drawn  
up,

up, and whirled round in the air, with the greatest violence, by means of a machine constructed for the purpose. The Mexicans, accustomed to the bloody sacrifice of their prisoners, “ failed not,” says Clavigero, “ to shed abundance of their own blood. It makes one shudder to read of the austerities which on some occasions they exercised on themselves, either as an atonement for their sins, or a preparation for their more solemn festivals. They mangled their flesh as if they had been insensible to pain, and let out their blood in the greatest profusion. This was practised every day by some of their priests. They pierced themselves with the sharp spines of aloes, and thrust them through several parts of their bodies, making the holes larger on every repetition of the operation. They had also severe watchings and fastings in their religious rites.”

At the fast of the Tlascalans, which lasted one hundred and sixty days “ the chief priest, attended by about two hundred

“ hundred persons ascended a high mountain, and when they descended, they had a number of little knives, and a great quantity of small rods delivered to them. The first day they bored holes through their tongues, through which they drew the rods, and notwithstanding the excessive pain, and loss of blood occasioned by it, they were obliged to sing aloud hymns to their gods. This cruel operation was repeated every twenty days. When eighty days of this fast of the priests was elapsed, a general fast of the people, from which the heads of the republic were not exempted, began, and was continued an equally long time.”

Inconsistent as it may seem to have been with this austerity, other rites of the antient heathen religions, and those which occurred the most frequently, encouraged, and indeed required, the extreme of sensual indulgence; and sometimes that of the most unnatural kind. It is not easy to say by what particular train of thinking they

they were led to conclude that such practices as these could be pleasing to the gods, but some of those deities that were to be appeased by human sacrifices were supposed to be no less pleased to see their worshippers indulge themselves in whatever could gratify their appetites; and their groves, and the temples themselves, were scenes of open prostitution.

It is well known that, in general, the heathens ascribed to their gods the passions and actions of men, and too many of the oriental princes, and those the most celebrated for their warlike and other exploits, gave into the extreme of both cruelty and lust. It is possible, however, that the indecent symbols of their worship, which might be originally designed to represent what is, no doubt, the most remarkable circumstance in the constitution of nature, viz. its *reproductive power*, or that of generation, might lead to those acts of lewdness with which the heathen worship abounded. And, incredible as it may appear to us, figures which cannot be  
named

named with decency, were exposed and carried about in these sacred processions, hymns were sung to them, and religious worship paid to them. This was done by the Egyptians, and most other antient nations, especially the Greeks, who borrowed the custom from them\*.

To recite the particulars of the indecencies of the heathen worship would be disgusting, and the account could hardly be given in language proper for a public assembly; but as something of this kind is become necessary, in order to give a just idea of the state of *facts* which have been strongly disguised by unbelievers, and to shew the great superiority of revealed religion to that which almost all mankind naturally fell into, I must, be excused if, for the sake of those who may have

\* Lucian, a heathen writer, says that, in the portico of the temple at Hierapolis, which stood on an hill, there was a tower three hundred cubits high, built in that indecent form, to the top of which a man ascended twice a year, where he continued seven days, that he might with more advantage converse with the gods above. In the worship of the people of Indostan, figures even more shocking to modesty than those of the antient western nations are now made use of.

been misled by such writers as Voltaire and others, (who have smoothed over the enormities of the heathen worship) recite as many particulars as may be necessary to give you an idea of the general character of the system, which they represent as perfectly innocent, and not at all unfavourable to purity of morals, their festivals, as Voltaire says, being only seasons of rejoicing, which could not be prejudicial to mankind. This would be true if their festivals had been nothing more than seasons of rejoicing. But judge for yourselves, whether they were not something more.

That lewdness was a part of the ancient heathen worship, is evident from the account that Moses gives of that of Baal Peor, to which the Israelites were inticed by the Moabites and Midianites. For during that festival, Phinehas asserted the honour of his religion by killing a man and a woman in the very act of fornication; which, from the narrative, appears to have been committed without any concealment. For we read, Numb. xxv. 6. *And behold*

*behold one of the children of Israel came, and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman, in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation; and when Phinehas the son of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest saw it, he arose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand, and he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through her belly. Now the name of the Israelite who was slain was Zimri the son of Salu, a prince of the chief house among the Simeonites, and the name of the Midianitish woman that was slain was Cozbi the daughter of Zur, who was head over a people, and of a chief house in Midian.*

This worship of Baal-Peor, if we may credit several antient writers, consisted in such obscene practices, or postures at least, as are not fit to be mentioned; so that it is not easy to say whether they were more ridiculous, or impure. Hosea says of this worship, ch. xi. 10. *They went unto Baal-Peor,*

*Peor, and separated themselves unto their shame; and their abominations were according as they loved, or, as the Bishop of Waterford renders it, and became abominable as the objects of their love, or worship.*

The farther we go back into antiquity or so much nearer to the time of Moses, the more undisguised were these shameful practices. It appears from Herodotus, the oldest Greek historian, that the temples of the heathen gods had been universally places of prostitution. For he says the Egyptians were the first who forbade it in their temples. He says that all other nations, except the Greeks (who borrowed much of their religion from the Egyptians) scrupled not to perform those actions in the temples. Nor did the Greeks wholly abstain from them. For when Antiochus Epiphanes converted the temple at Jerusalem, into a temple of Jupiter Olympius, we read, 2 Mac. vi. 4. *The temple was filled with riot and revelling by the Gentiles, who dallied with harlots, and had to do with women, within the circuit of the holy places.*

Julius

Julius Firmicus says that, after the season of *mourning*, with which the principal festival of the oriental nations commenced, the rest of the time was spent with every expression of mirth and jollity, to which they added the most abominable debauchery, adultery, and incest. These were constantly practised in their groves and temples\*.

Surely, then, we may say, with the apostle in my text, that, as a punishment for men's apostacy from his worship, *God gave up the heathen world to vile affections*; and that there was infinite wisdom and goodness in the Jewish and Christian dispensations, in which we are taught a mode of worship worthy of a pure and holy God, a religion the great object of which is the purest morality, and in which all the abominations of the heathen worship are treated with just abhorrence. For our unspeakable happiness in being favour-

\* "In what temple," says Juvenal, a Roman heathen poet, "are not women debauched?" *Quo non prostat femina templo.*

SAT. ix. 24.

ed with these revelations, we cannot be too thankful. But I must defer the farther consideration of these, and other enormities of the heathen worship, with which the generality of christians are little acquainted, but which you must be sensible, it is highly useful for them to know, though disgusting to contemplate, to another discourse, with which I shall conclude this part of my subject.

## DISCOURSE IV.

### *A View of Heathen Worship.*

---

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness. Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead, so that they are without excuse. Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore also God gave them up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves, who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. For this cause God gave them up to vile affections.

ROMANS, i. 18---26.

THE most plausible objections made to the system of revelation, and those by which persons who have no knowledge of antiquity are most liable to be impressed,  
are

are those which relate to the Jewish religion, and the books of the Old Testament, with which the generality of Christians are too little acquainted. Voltaire, and other unbelievers, are more particularly fond of representing the institutions of Moses as unreasonably intolerant, with respect to the heathens who, they say, only differed from the Hebrews in religious opinions. It therefore behoves those who undertake the defence of revealed religion to shew, what it is very easy to do, that antient heathenism was by no means a mere system of speculative opinions, and innocent practices; but that, besides being absurd in the extreme, it really promoted the most destructive and the most execrable vices, and that the religion of the Hebrews was free from every tendency of the kind, and infinitely superior to it in every other respect.

In my last discourse I gave you an idea of some of the enormities of the heathen religion, such as, though well known to the learned, are not so to the generality of Christians,

Christians, and yet without this knowledge it is impossible that they can have a just idea of the value of their own religion, or a right understanding of the scriptures, especially those of the Old Testament, in which there are perpetual allusions to the principles and rites of the heathen worship. I particularly mentioned the multiplicity of the heathen deities, the vile characters of many of them, the horrid rite of human sacrifices, the painful austerities to which their religion subjected them, and the open prostitution which was encouraged by it, and practised in their very temples; and in support of my representations, I recited a variety of facts, from the authority of the scriptures, and other antient writings. Had I contented myself with exclaiming in general terms only against the religion of the heathens, saying of it, as Voltaire does of the religion of the Jews, that it was an *execrable superstition*, without reciting any of the circumstances which shew it to have been such, all that you could have inferred would have been, that

I was

was desirous of impressing your minds with an abhorrence of that religion, but then you would have had no knowledge of the reasons why it deserved that abhorrence, and therefore might have paid no regard to my unsupported representation.

My last discourse concluded with observing that a most prominent feature in the religion of the antient heathens, was the encouragement it gave to lewdness, and this continued with increase, when, in the progress of civilization, the cruel rite of human sacrifices, and their painful austerities, became less frequent. For this reason the apostle Paul, in the chapter which contains my text, and in other parts of his epistles, particularly dwells upon it.

On this subject I shall only mention one more circumstance, which is several times mentioned, or alluded to, in the scriptures. It is that a considerable revenue arose to many of the heathen temples, as is now the case in Indostan, from the prostitution that was encouraged

in them, or in places provided for that abominable purpose adjoining to them. The Divine Being, alluding to this practice of the heathens, says, by Moses, Deut. xxiii. 18. *Thou shalt not bring the hire of a harlot into the house of the Lord thy God. There shall be no harlot of the daughters of Israel, nor a Sodomite of the sons of Israel.* For, incredible as it may appear to us, who have had the happiness of being educated in the principles of the purest of all religions, even unnatural pollution was allowed, and encouraged, in the religion of the antient heathens. For this we have the clear evidence of the scriptures, as well as of many antient writers. Concerning the pious king Josiah, we read, 2 Kings, xxiii. 7. that *he brake down the houses of the Sodomites that were by the house of the Lord, where the woman wove hangings for the grove, or rather for Aferoth, or Astarte, a famous Syrian goddess\*.*

Besides

\* Herodotus informs us that at Babylon, a city the most devoted to the worship of idols of all the nations of antiquity every woman was obliged once in her life to prostitute herself

In the time of Constantine, and no doubt from times of the most remote antiquity, the Egyptians had religious rites in which sodomy was practised, and they imagined that the rise of the Nile depended on the observance of them. These this Christian emperor ordered to be discontinued; and whereas the superstitious heathens

self to some stranger in the temple of Venus. Because the most wealthy disdained to expose themselves in public, among the rest, they went in covered chariots to the gates of the temple, with a numerous train of servants attending at a distance. But the far greater part went into the temple itself, and sat down covered with garlands. The galleries in which they sat were in a straight line, and open on every side, that all strangers might have free passage to chuse such as they liked best. The beautiful women, he says, were soon dismissed; but the deformed were sometimes obliged to wait three or four days before they could satisfy the law. The person who made choice of any of them made her a present, which was sacred to the deity, and could not be refused, though ever so small.

The same historian says that the women of Cyprus had a custom not unlike this of the Babylonians. There was the like in the temple of Venus at Sicca in Africa, at Corinth, and at Comana in Cappadocia. In the temple of Venus at Aphaca, on mount Libanus, there was a kind of academy of lewdness, open to all debauched persons, where the most beastly crimes were committed in the temple, as a privileged place, exempt from all law and government. The *ludi Florales* at Rome were celebrated by a company of prostitutes, who

thens had imagined that the consequence of this suppression would be that the river would not rise as usual, the Christians said it rose higher than before.

Sodomy, says Julius Firmicus, who wrote in the time of the sons of Constantine, was then practised in the temple of Juno. He adds that they were so far from being ashamed of it, that they gloried in it. And it appears from various writers, that the gains of this abominable kind of prostitution were a source of revenue to the heathen temples, as well as those of the women who belonged to them. And yet of this religion Voltaire says that “it

who ran up and down naked, using the most lascivious postures. The temple of Venus at Corinth maintained above a thousand prostitutes, sacred to her service, and what they got was given to the goddess. The same is the case at this day with respect to many of the temples in Indostan. Tavernier says there is a Pagod near Cambaye, where women prostitute themselves, and Marco Polo says that the like custom prevailed at Camul; and that when it was forbidden by the Mahometan prince Mongou Khan, and the order had been obeyed three years, the people sent deputies to get it repealed, as they said that their fields had not been so fruitful as they had been before.

“ could

“ could not be of any prejudice to man-  
 “ kind.”\*

Besides the rites which were performed in public, and at which all persons were permitted, and often required, to be present, there were in the antient heathen religions, rites of a private nature, to which none were admitted but under an oath of secrecy, the violation of which was deemed to be the greatest act of impiety. Some have supposed that the design of these *mysteries*, as those rites were called,

\* How the rites of the goddess Cybele operated as an incentive to lewdness may be seen in Juvenal, Sat. vi. 313. &c.

That these practices thus sanctioned by religion, had a fatal influence on the public opinion and the public morals, is evident from the writings of the heathens, especially those of the poets, which abound with the most disgusting obscenities. One of the most admired eclogues of Virgil, who is esteemed the chastest of the Roman poets, celebrates the love of a man to a boy, and the only remaining, and much admired poem, of the Greek poetess Sappho, describes that of a woman to a woman, which is an abundant confirmation of what to us appears most incredible in the apostle Paul's representation of the depravity of the Gentile world. And with the disbelief of revelation we find in fact, that the just abhorrence which all the Christian world entertain for these unnatural vices disappears; a proof of which might be given in some well authenticated anecdotes of the late king of Prussia, but not to be related in this place.

was

was to shew the absurdity of the popular worship; but this is in the highest degree improbable. Indeed, nothing which should have been suspected to have that tendency would have been borne with, and they who made the greatest account of these mysteries were the most devoted to the popular superstitions. The most probable opinion is, that whatever was the original intention of these private mysteries, they became a scene of such exhibitions and practices, as were worse than any that were transacted in public.

Socrates, the most moral of all the heathen philosophers, and the least attached to the vulgar superstition, would never be initiated into these mysteries. In the time of Cicero the very term *mysteries* was almost synonymous to *abominations*, and we may well suppose what the nature of them must have been when it is known that they were celebrated in the night, in honour of Bacchus, Venus, or Cupid, and that indecent images were carried in procession in them, so that they could not fail

fail to countenance that impurity, and dissoluteness of manners, which was so general in the Pagan world. To these mysteries it is most probable that Paul refers, when he says, Ephes. v. 12. *It is a shame even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.* Clemens Alexandrinus called these mysteries, “the mysteries of atheistical men,” adding, “I may rightly call them  
“atheists, who are destitute of the know-  
“ledge of him who is truly God, and who  
“most impudently worship a boy torn in  
“pieces by the Titans, women lamenting,  
“and the parts which modesty forbids  
“to name.” A Roman consul discovered that “the Bacchanalian mysteries  
“consisted of such things as the most un-  
“bounded prostitution could exhibit in  
“private and nocturnal assemblies, that no  
“person could be initiated into them  
“without renouncing his modesty, while  
“the priests who presided over them pre-  
“scribed in public, to those who were to  
“be admitted to them, a ten days  
“abstinence.” Constantine, who forbade  
the

the practice of sodomy in the religious rites of the Egyptians, forbade all secret rites of initiation in all the Roman empire.

But there is no occasion to pry into the secret mysteries of the heathen religion for scenes sufficiently shocking to decency. Public games and plays, in which the flagitious actions of the heathen gods were represented, were always considered as acts of religion, and celebrated in their honour, though some of the wiser of the antients were ashamed of these exhibitions. Cicero, speaking of the adulteries of Jupiter, his ravishing the boy Ganymede, and carrying him off to be his cup-bearer, says, “Homer feigned these things, and ascribed human actions and qualities to the gods. I had rather that he had raised man to the imitation of what is divine.” It is not, however, true that Homer invented those stories. He only introduced into his poems what was generally believed in his time. “The same gods,” says Austin, “that were ridiculed on the theatre, were adored in the temples.” And  
what

what is particularly remarkable, is that worfe things were afcribed to gods of the greateft dignity, as Jupiter, than to any of an inferior rank. Such was the religion which Voltaire represents as perfectly innocent, with refpect to its moral tendency.

Some of the rites of the antient heathen religions, which were not remarkable for their cruelty or lewdnefs, confifted of fuch instances of favage ferocity and extravagance, as are not eafily accounted for. But whatever was the *caufe* that led to fuch rites, the *facts* that I fhall mention are unqueftionable, and perhaps fuch perfons as Voltaire would not have been fhocked, but only amufed, with them.

When the fun entered Aries, at the time of the vernal equinox, the Egyptians celebrated a festival in honour of the fun, when perfons of both fexes counterfeited madnefs, ran about the ftreets, and alfo up hills, and through deferts, pulling in pieces the carcafes of the animals they facrificed, breaking their bones, and eating

ing the flesh raw with the blood running out of their mouths, and committing every sort of extravagance. From Egypt this rite passed into Greece. At Chios, and also at Tenedos, they sacrificed a man, whom they tore in pieces in this manner. Plutarch, speaking of these things, says  
 “ These festivals and direful sacrifices,  
 “ which are celebrated with eating raw  
 “ flesh, torn with men’s nails, as others  
 “ in which men fast, and beat their breasts,  
 “ were not, I think, performed on the  
 “ account of any of the gods, but rather  
 “ to mollify and appease the fury of some  
 “ evil demon. For it is not probable that  
 “ there ever was a god, who required  
 “ men to be sacrificed to him, as has  
 “ been antiently done, or received such  
 “ sacrifices with approbation.” But Plutarch, from his own better reason, thought too favourably of the religion of his ancestors.

In the *Omophagia*, which was a festival of the Greeks in honour of Bacchus, the priests tore with their teeth, and devoured,  
 the

the entrails of the goats which they sacrificed, raw and reeking, in imitation of their god. And the *Lupercalia*, one of the most antient of the Roman festivals, in honour of the god Pan, was celebrated by the priests running about the streets, naked, all but the middle, and striking all they met, and especially women, with thongs made of the skins of the goats, which they sacrificed. And the women, thinking there was great virtue in those lashings, rather threw themselves in their way than avoided them.

What a striking contrast with respect to all the things I have enumerated do we see between the religious rites of the heathens, and those prescribed to the Hebrews, in none of which is there any thing that favours of cruelty, immorality, or indecency; and yet Voltaire is ever loading the religion of the Jews with every term of reproach, and apologizing for that of the heathens.

The proper parent of all superstition, and false religion, is, as I have observed

*ignorance*

*ignorance of nature*, and the true causes of events; and men being naturally anxious about the good or evil that may befall them, not knowing, their true causes, but ascribing every thing to some cause or other, were led, from circumstances which it is impossible at this distance of time to trace, to fix upon causes entirely foreign to the purpose. But though their opinions, and some of the practices derived from them, cannot now be mentioned without exciting a smile of contempt, they were serious things in times of antiquity; and to have laughed at them then would have cost a man dear.

When the sun, and his emblem fire, were the principal objects of worship, it was imagined that no child would live or thrive, that was not made to pass through the fire, and therefore the drawing them over lighted straw, or any kind of flame that would not materially injure them, was deemed a necessary rite of religion. This we find practised by the Israelites, in imitation of their neighbours, during their defection from their own religion. Thus

we read concerning Manassey Chr. xxxiii. 10, that *he caused his children to pass through the fire, in the valley of the son of Hinnom, as also that he observed times, used enchantments, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and wizards*, all which practices were of heathen origin, and deserve to be particularly noticed.

The *observing times*, or distinguishing days into the lucky and unlucky, when they cannot have any real influence on the business transacted in them, was a very antient heathen superstition, and even continues to this day, though one of the remains of heathenism, in most Christian countries.

Lucian, a heathen philosopher, speaking of unlucky days, says “on them neither  
“do the magistrates meet to consult about  
“public affairs, neither are law suits decided in the hall, nor sacrifices offered,  
“nor in fine any sort of business undertaken, in which a man would wish  
“himself fortunate.” He says that Lycurgus the great Lacedemonian lawgiver made a fundamental institution of government

ment, never to enter upon any warlike expedition, but when the moon was at the full; being of opinion that all things were under the influence of the moon, and that neither would their forces abroad act with sufficient vigour and success, nor would their affairs at home be so well conducted, in the increase, as in the decrease, of that planet. The emperor Augustus was so much a slave to this superstition, that he never went abroad on the day after the *nundinæ*, on which the public markets were held, nor did he begin any serious undertaking on the *nones* of any month. Ambrose says that the first converts from heathenism were much addicted to these observances.

What is called *witchcraft*, which is another of the superstitious practices to which Manasseh was addicted, was very common among the heathens. It consisted in the invocation of demons, in order to produce by incantation, charms, medicated compositions of herbs, &c. the most surprizing effects. This art Maimonides  
says

says was much practised by the Zabii, and the Chaldeans; and it was very common among the Egyptians, and Cannanites.

None of these magical operations could be performed without a regard to the stars. For they held that every plant had its governing star. With the heathens, therefore, these magical practices were acts of religion. By this means they believed that the demons were subject to them. In the antient heathen religions the most extraordinary effects, especially of the mischevious kind, were ascribed to charms, and talismans, but it was supposed that they might be counteracted by more potent charms, though alike insignificant. A superstitious person, says Theophrastus, if he sees a weasel cross his path, goes no farther, till some other person goes before him, or till he has thrown three stones across the way. Many of these things, though absurd in the extreme, made so deep an impression on the minds of the heathens, that it was with great difficulty that they were brought

to disregard them when they embraced christianity.

It might be imagined that these idle notions and customs were peculiar to the vulgar among the heathens, but they were regularly practised by the gravest magistrates of the wisest states in antiquity. For in fact when those states were constituted, the legislators themselves were not, in these respects, more knowing than the rest of the people. When any great public calamity was to be averted at Rome, the first magistrate went in solemn procession, and drove a nail of brass into the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus. This was deemed to be the most effectual method of appeasing the anger of the gods.

The greatest stress was laid by the ancients on solemn *imprecations*, as we see in the case of Balak, king of Moab, who at a great expence, sent for the prophet Balaam to curse Israel. For the curses of prophets and priests, were thought to be the most efficacious. Hence it was customary for men condemned for any notorious crime

to be publicly cursed by the priests. It was also often done from particular enmity and faction. Thus when Crassus the Roman triumvir undertook his famous expedition against the Parthians, his opponent Ateius Capito, the tribune, running to the gate of the city through which he passed, placed there vessels full of burning coals, on which he offered odours and oblations, and then he pronounced the most direful curses against him as he went along.

Prying into futurity was always a great object in the religion of the heathens; and from their ignorance of nature, they imagined that the gods, who were the rulers of the fates of men, gave indications of future events by various signs, which it was the business of the priests to study. This was the act of divination,

Divination was most commonly made by sacrifices, and especially by the observation of the entrails, and more particularly the livers, of the victims. This among the Romans was a science of itself, and a distinct order of priests, called *Ha-*

*raspices*, were appointed to the study and practice of it. Another solemn divination was by the observation of the flight of birds, and this was the business of another order of priests, called *Augurs*; and unless their reports were favourable, no public business could be transacted. A peculiarly solemn rite of this kind called *taking the auspices*, was by observing the manner in which a coop of poultry, which was kept for the purpose, ate their food. If they did it heartily, the omen was thought to be favourable, if otherwise, unfavourable; and so much were the minds of the Roman soldiers impressed by this circumstance, that no prudent general would risk an engagement with the enemy, till the augurs made a favourable report.

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, did not undertake his expedition against Jerusalem without first consulting the gods, according to the rites of divination practised in his time, though we know but little of them at present. Thus we read, Ez. xxi. 21. *The king of Babylon stood at the*  
*hurting*

*parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination. He made his arrows bright, he consulted with images, he looked in the liver. At his right hand was the divination for Jerusalem, to appoint captains, to open the mouth in the slaughter, to lift up the voice with shouting, to appoint battering rams against the gates, to cast a mount, and to build a fort.*

It were endless to enumerate all the various modes of divination practised by the antient heathens, as by lots, by ominous words and things, &c. with allusions to which the Greek and Roman writers abound, so that they are well known to every school-boy. But one of the most extraordinary and direful of these modes of divination, that by having recourse to the dead, I must briefly mention. This was the serious art of *necromancy*, to which Manasseh was said to have been addicted; and to this king Saul had recourse in his distresses. Thus also Ulysses is represented by Homer as sacrificing a black sheep in a ditch, and after pouring libations, inviting the ghost of Tiresias and others to drink of

the blood, in order to their answering the questions that would be put to them.

Similar to this was the *having to do with familiar spirits*, and *wizards*, with which Manasseh is likewise charged; for the answers received by this means are represented as seeming to come from under the ground, the place of the dead; as we read Is. viii. 19. *Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards, that peep and that mutter*, and Is. xxix. 4. *Thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust*. Sometimes the persons who pretended to this art seemed to speak out of their own bellies. Of this kind Maimonides says is the oracle of Pytho. “He is one,” he says, “who after a kind of fumigation, “flourishes a myrtle rod in his hand, and “pronounces certain set words of incantment. Then he seems to consult one “who is talking with him, and answers “his questions, as it were from under the “ground, with so low a voice, that he “cannot

“ cannot distinctly hear it, but must collect the meaning by his imagination.”

Thus have I endeavoured to give you a general idea of the nature of the heathen religion, as it was practised in the earliest ages, and indeed as it continued, with little or no improvement, till the promulgation of christianity. It was not, you see, a merely contemptible superstition, founded on the grossest ignorance of the laws of nature, but such as in the highest degree must have debased the minds, and have corrupted the morals, of men. How justly is the state of the heathen world described by the apostle Paul in my text, and other sacred writers; and how remote from truth, and the appearance of truth, is the account that Voltaire, and other unbelievers, out of a desire to discredit revelation, have given of it. Surely then the rectifying these fundamental errors, into which all the world had fallen, with respect to religion, and the putting an end to practices so debasing to the human character, and so destructive of human happiness,

happiness, was an object not unworthy of the great parent and friend of mankind.

That there was no prospect of men, by any use they could make of their own reason, recovering from this deplorable ignorance and corruption, was evident by the experience of three thousand years, in which, though many parts of the world became enlightened in other respects, they grew, if possible, more confirmed in their attachment to their religions received from their ancestors; continuing to believe, notwithstanding the strongest appearances to the contrary, that the prosperity of their several states, and even the fertility of the ground, depended upon the observance of their particular rites. And therefore as soon as the heathen magistrates saw the rapid spread of christianity, and the danger to which their antient religions were exposed in consequence of it, they employed all their power to suppress it, persecuting the professors of the new religion in every form, though happily in vain. Truth, supported by clear evidence,

evidence, could not be overcome by power.

That nothing less than repeated interpositions of the deity could have preserved any part of the human race from this shocking idolatry, so destructive of virtue and of happiness, is particularly evident from the history of all the nations descended from Abraham, whose founders were, no doubt, instructed by him in the knowledge and worship of the one true God, and who, notwithstanding this, all became idolaters. This was the case with the Arabs, descended from Ishmael, and other sons of that great patriarch, though in the time of Job, who was probably prior to Moses, some of them were not so. This was also the case with the Edomites, though descended from Isaac, and of the Moabites and Ammonites, descended from Lot, the friend and companion of Abraham. There must, therefore, have been some thing exceedingly fascinating and plausible in the systems of heathen worship, though to us, who have been enlightened by revelation, nothing appears more absurd and shocking.

But

But *when the world by its own wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, as the apostle says, 1 Cor. i. 21, by the foolishness of preaching, i. e. by the gospel (which at its first publication was ridiculed as foolish by those who were reputed wise) to effect a reformation. And to this day there has not been any reformation of the most absurd of the heathen religions, but by means of the gospel. All that Mahometanism has done in this respect was by means of the principles derived from the Jewish and Christian religions, the truth of which it supposes. Thus was verified the declaration of our Saviour, John xiv. 6. No man cometh to the father (or attains to the knowledge and worship of the one true God) but by me; a most extraordinary prediction, but abundantly verified by facts.*

Can we then be too thankful to God for the promulgation of the gospel which has not only *brought life and immortality to light*, by the clear revelation of a future state; but has freed mankind from the grossest ignorance, and superstitious addictions to innumerable practices of the most hor-

rid and abominable nature; such as furnished incentives and opportunity for every vice, the most debasing of the characters of men, and the cause of infinite mischiefs to them, both as individuals, and as members of society. The gospel, whatever else may be said of it, has been, if there be any truth in history, the only, but it has been an effectual, remedy of these great evils; while all the evils that have been charged upon *it*, are clearly owing to a departure from its genuine principles, as they are now to be seen in the New Testament, the rise and progress of them being investigated with the greatest ease and certainty. And as the reformation advances they are now every where abated, and may therefore be expected soon to disappear, when the gospel will again appear in its purity, the greatest of blessings to all the human race.

## DISCOURSE V.

### *The excellence of the Mosaic Institutions.*

---

Behold I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them. For this is your wisdom and understanding, in the sight of the nations which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so near unto them as the Lord your God is, in all things that ye call upon him for; and what nation is there so great that hath statutes and judgments so righteous, as all this law which I set before you this day.

DEUT. iv. 5---8.

HAVING, in the two preceding discourses, given you a view of the religions of the antient heathen nations, I shall now, by way of contrast, give you a similar view of that of the Hebrews; and this it will be the easier to do, as the original records of it are extant in the writings of Moses, which were composed at the time of its institution; so that there cannot be  
any

any difficulty in distinguishing the genuine principles of this religion from the corruptions and abuses of it. No other nation can give such an account of the origin of their religion. For it is not pretended that any other has writings coeval with their institutions. All the accounts of them are traditional, and their traditions are derived from the most remote antiquity; so that much is necessarily left to conjecture with respect to them.

The superior excellence of the system of Hebrew religion and policy, for they had the same source, and the most intimate connection, is strongly asserted by Moses in my text. On the other hand, Voltaire, followed by the generality of unbelievers, says, that “ the Jews were  
“ an ignorant and barbarous people, who  
“ have for a long time joined the basest  
“ avarice to the most detestable supersti-  
“ tion. They have done much hurt,” he says, “ to themselves, and to the hu-  
“ man race.” This writer had, no doubt, read the books of Moses, and the other  
books

books of the Old Testament, for he frequently quotes them; but many persons, without ever reading these books themselves, take for granted that what he says of them is true. But, my brethren, be persuaded to make use of your own eyes, and judge for yourselves. To assist you in this, I shall, as briefly as possible, lay before you the most important particulars of which the institutions of Moses consist, and occasionally compare them with particulars of a similar nature in the systems of the heathens, which were contemporary with them.

In order to throw the greater odium on the Hebrew nation, Voltaire says, “ they were ignorant and barbarous, that “ they were never famous for any art, “ they never were natural philosophers, “ geometricians, or astronomers.” Admitting this to be the case, if there be any wisdom, or superior excellence, in their religious or political institutions, it will be the more probable that they had some other source than any knowledge of their  
own.

own. But I do not desire to take any advantage of this circumstance.

It is not true that, in ancient times, the Hebrews were much, if at all, inferior to other nations with respect to the arts. In the art of war, which, even in the age of Moses comprized many other arts, it will hardly be denied that the Hebrews, if there was nothing miraculous in their history, must have excelled. For to say nothing of their emancipating themselves from the yoke of the Egyptians, then the most warlike people in the world, when they were wholly unprovided for the contest, they completely expelled the inhabitants of Canaan, ten times more numerous than themselves, who had horses and chariots of iron, and whose cities are said to have been *fenced up to heaven*, when they only fought on foot. The whole land of Canaan was of no great extent, and yet David conquered, and held in subjection, all the neighbouring nations; and it is probable that they continued tributary to the Israelites all the reign of Solomon.

Solomon. There are few nations in all antiquity that can boast of two such princes as David and Solomon with all their faults.

The construction of the tabernacle in the time of Moses, and of the temple in the time of Solomon, shows that there were ingenious artists among them, as well as in other countries, and the knowledge that any people in these early ages had of real *science*, that is, of the laws of nature, and the application of that knowledge to any useful purpose, was very inconsiderable. Knowledge of this kind would have prevented that miserable superstition, in which, as I have shewn, the antient heathen religion consisted.

As to what is properly called *literature*, or the art of writing, and composing books, no antient nation can pretend to vie with the Hebrews. We have no account of any books so old as those of Moses, and though there is not in them the least appearance of *art*, or studied composition, they are written with that engaging simplicity, which has not yet been exceeded  
by

by any writings whatever. The pathos in the address of Moses to his nation in the book of Deuteronomy, written just before his death, is inimitable. It is not possible to read it, if I may judge of the feelings of other persons by my own, without the strongest emotions. The incidents in the history of Joseph were not the invention of Moses, but they have lost nothing in going through his hands. There is not, in all antiquity, so affecting a narrative.

With respect to the knowledge of human nature and human life, the proverbs of Solomon discover as much of it as the sayings of the seven wise men of Greece, in a much later period; and for sublimity of sentiment, and energy of expression, the psalms of David, and the writings of Isaiah, and other Hebrew prophets, though in a language but imperfectly known, and though they have suffered more than any writings whatever by frequent copying, are infinitely superior to any poetical compositions of the Greeks or Romans in any age;

age; especially if they be read in prose translations, which is all that we can do with respect to the poetry of the Hebrews, the measure of which is now lost. Both are extant. Let them be compared by the principles of just criticism; but not by so prejudiced a person as Voltaire.

The Egyptians had the art of writing, but they had no books of which we have any certain account. The same was the case with the Chaldeans. And as to the Greeks, they were, in a period long after the time of Moses, as barbarous and ignorant as the North American Indians at this day. If we may judge of the antient Hebrews by the Jews, who are descended from them, we must say that, with respect to natural ingenuity, or industry, they are far from being inferior to the rest of mankind. They are perhaps rather superior, not by nature (for in that respect probably all mankind are nearly equal) but in consequence of the greater exercise of their faculties, owing in a great measure to the treatment they have met with from other nations,

tions, and the manner in which they are compelled to provide for their maintenance among them. In Europe at least, a very silly, or a very idle, Jew could hardly subsist.

But without any regard to the *people*, let us consider their *institutions*; and in doing this we must endeavour to forget, or overlook, principles that are familiar to us Christians, and which we derived from the scriptures, and attend simply to the state of the world in the time of Moses, and the principles and customs which were then most prevalent, and which the Israelites themselves had in a great measure adopted while they were in Egypt. Admitting that Moses, in consequence of his having been educated at the court of Pharoah, was acquainted with all the learning of the Egyptians, he had no opportunity of acquiring *more*, or indeed any knowledge of a different kind; and he was not likely to improve his knowledge of any kind by living afterwards forty years among the Arabs, where he married, and

was settled; having probably given up all thoughts of ever returning to Egypt, his life being in danger if he did.

Notwithstanding this, at the age of eighty, he did return, and though Egypt was then in a state of its greatest power, and his countrymen in a state of the most abject servitude, destitute of arms or friends, he effected their complete emancipation, in a very few months without the loss of a single life, while the Egyptians were so weakened, or overawed, that, though the Israelites continued many years in their neighbourhood, and without any connection with other nations, their old masters never attempted to get them back again: and yet on account of the service they had derived from them, they had been most unwilling to part with them. This, however, is a circumstance, which, though highly favourable to the supposition of there being something miraculous in their deliverance, I only mention by the way, before I recite the particulars of those institutions, which, in their state of emancipation

emancipation from their bondage in Egypt, and before they had got any other settlement, Moses delivered to them.

In considering these institutions, let us pay no regard to what Moses says of their having been delivered to him by God, but only what they are in themselves, that we may judge, from the circumstances of the times, whether it be more probable that they were devised by himself, or that they were communicated to him in the manner that he relates. In this view of the Mosaic institutions I shall not, however, strictly confine myself to what may be drawn from the writings of Moses, but take advantage of the farther lights that are thrown upon them in other books of the Old Testament, the authors of which had no other sources of information. They are all written on the same principles, and in the same spirit.

1. You have seen the monstrous polytheism of all the nations of antiquity. In direct opposition to this, the first, and most fundamental, principle in the religion of the

Hebrews, was that of the *unity of God*. The first of the ten commandments, delivered from mount Sinai is (Exodus. xx. 2.) *Thou shalt have no other Gods besides me.* This precept is repeated with the greatest emphasis through all the writings of Moses, and those of the subsequent prophets. Deut. vi. 4. *Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind,* that is, with an undivided affection, there being no other legitimate object of worship besides him.

That this principle is a just one, will not now be questioned; but, compared with the principles and practices which then prevailed in the world, it must be pronounced to be not only just, but also great, and sublime; being entirely remote from the apprehensions of the most enlightened of mankind in that age. That such an immense, and infinitely various, structure as that of the world, or rather what was called the universe, consisting of all  
the

the visible objects in nature, the system of the sun, moon, and stars, as well as the earth and sea, should have had any proper author, and much more only *one* author, that one mind should perfectly comprehend, and direct, the whole, was utterly incomprehensible by mankind; and therefore they had recourse to a multiplicity of superior beings, each presiding in his separate province; and hence the idea of the different characters and dispositions, of the heathen gods, and the varieties in their modes of worshipping them. It is in vain that we look for such an idea as Moses gives of the Deity, even among the learned Greeks, two thousand years after his time, when they had long been possessed of leisure, and every other advantage, for speculations concerning the origin of the universe, which was indeed the great object of their philosophy.

2. You have seen in what strange *forms* the heathens represented their divinities, and under what symbols, as the figures of animals, and others, they worshipped

shipped them, a practice that must have suggested low and degrading ideas of their gods. And it actually led to the worship of the animals, and the images themselves, divine powers being supposed to reside in them. This was universal among the nations that bordered on Judea. The Persians, indeed, who worshipped the sun, had no images of their god besides fire: but all the nations that the Hebrews in the time of Moses, were acquainted with, were properly *idolaters*, worshipping their gods by means of images in various shapes, and the Egyptians the animals themselves.

This source of corruption and abuse was effectually cut off in the institutions of Moses. The second commandment expressly says, *Exod. xx. 4. Thou shalt not make to thee any graven image, or the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down to them nor serve them.* Also when Moses, a short time before his death, reminds the Israelites of what they had seen and heard,  
and

and of their obligation to respect his laws, he says, Deut. iv. 14. *When the Lord spake to you out of the midst of the fire, ye heard the voice of the words, but ye saw no similitude, only ye heard a voice. Take ye therefore good heed to yourselves, for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake to you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire, lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flies in the air, the likeness of any thing that creepeth upon the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters under the earth; and lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heavens, should be drawn to worship and serve them.*

The very idea of an intelligent Being, immense and omnipotent, and without any definite form, never occurred to any of the heathens. It is in vain that we look among their philosophers for any thing  
so

so great and sublime. The least degree of attention will convince us of the greatness and sublimity of it, and yet it was familiar to this *ignorant and barbarous people* as Voltaire represents the Hebrews to have been.

These great and splendid objects, the sources of light and heat, and, as was supposed, of other beneficial influences, which were the primary objects of worship to other nations, Moses always described as having been created by the one supreme God, as well as the earth, which was another great object of worship to the heathen world. According to the just and sublime description of the writers of the Old Testament, all things are subject to the controul of this one great Being, Dan. iv. 35. *He doth whatever he pleases in the armies of heaven above, as well as among the inhabitants of the earth beneath.* Heaven is the throne, and the earth the footstool of God.

According to the principles of the wisest of the heathen nations, *matter*, if not the world itself, with all the visible system

system of things was eternal, and the gods who were the objects of the popular worship, arose out of it, and of course after it. For the idea they had received by tradition of *one God* having created all things, was soon lost and forgotten, so that he was no object of their worship at all.

The supremacy of this one God, as the author, and lord, of universal nature, is declared in the most emphatical terms on a variety of occasions in the Hebrew scriptures. On a solemn fast, after the return from the Babylonish captivity, we find an address made to God, in which they say, Neh. ix. 5. *Blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. Thou, even thou, art Lord alone. Thou hast made the heaven, and the heaven of heavens, with all their hosts, the earth, and all things that are therein, the sea, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all, and all the host of heaven worship thee.* Do such sentiments as these, and such language as this, bespeak the Hebrews to have been that ignorant, barbarous, and superstitious,

superstitious nation, that Voltaire describes them as having always been?

3. Let us now see what are said to have been the *attributes* of this one God, the sole object of worship to the Hebrew nation, according to their own writings. The objects of the worship of the heathen nations, we have seen, were according to themselves, all limited in their knowledge and powers, and indeed by one another, one of them being occupied in this province, and another in that. But the God of the Hebrews is always represented as omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient.

According to the sublime language of the prophet Isaiah (xl. 12.) *It is he who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, who has meted out the heavens with a span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, hath weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance. Who, says he, has directed the spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor has taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him knowledge,*  
and

*and shewed him the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are as the drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance. Behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him as less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God, or what likeness will ye compare unto him? Have ye not known, have ye not heard, has it not been told you from the beginning? It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the heavens, and the inhabitants of the earth are as grasshoppers, who stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in. Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding.*

What a sublime idea doth Solomon give of the attributes of God, on occasion of the dedication of the temple. 1 Kings viii. 27. *But will God indeed dwell on earth? Behold the heaven, and the heaven of heavens, cannot contain thee. How much less this house which I have built? In the prophet Jeremiah,*

miah, the divine Being is represented as saying, *Am I a God at hand, and not a God afar off? Can any person hide himself in secret places that I cannot find him? saith the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.* The secrets of the hearts of men are represented as known to God. Jer. xvii. 9. *I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.*

Where shall we find in any of the Greek or Latin poets such an idea of any of the heathen gods as David gives us of the God of the Hebrews in the cxxxix. Psalm? *O Lord thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my down sitting, and my uprising. Thou understandest my thoughts afar off. Thou compassedst my path, and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and hast laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit,*  
or

*or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in the grave, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, or dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shalt thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee, but the night shineth as the day. The darkness and the day are both alike to thee.*

The absurdity of the heathen worship, and the vain pretensions of the heathen gods, are finely ridiculed by the Hebrew prophets. Isaiah, foretelling the destruction of Babylon, a city peculiarly devoted to the worship of idols, says, chap. xlv. 1.  
“ Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth.  
“ Their idols were upon the beasts, and  
“ upon the cattle, your carriages were  
“ heavy laden, they are a burden to the  
“ weary beast. They stoop, they bow  
“ down together, they could not deliver  
“ the burden, but themselves are gone  
“ into captivity.” Jeremiah expresses  
equal

equal contempt of them, when he says chap. viii. 1. “ Thus faith the Lord, Learn  
‘ not the ways of the heathen, and be  
‘ not dismayed at the signs of heaven,  
‘ for the heathen are dismayed at them.  
‘ For the customs of the people are vain.  
‘ For one cutteth a tree out of the forest  
‘ (the work of the hand of the workman,)  
‘ with the ax. They deck it with silver  
‘ and with gold, they fasten it with nails  
‘ and with hammers, that it move not.  
‘ They are upright as the palm-tree, but  
‘ speak not. They must needs be borne,  
‘ because they cannot go. Be not afraid  
‘ of them, for they cannot do evil, nei-  
‘ ther is it in them to do good. For as-  
‘ much as there is none like unto thee, O  
‘ Lord. Thou art great, and thy name  
‘ is great in might. Who would not fear  
‘ thee, O King of nations, for to thee doth  
‘ it appertain.

4. Considering the shockingly cruel and abominable customs of the heathens, we do not wonder that such worship as theirs was most strictly forbidden to the Israel-  
ites.

ites. Indeed, to preserve in the world the knowledge and worship of the one true God, was the great object of the institutions of Moses; and a greater and more worthy object cannot be conceived. In the directions that Moses gives his countrymen, how they should conduct themselves in the land of Canaan, he says, Deut. xii. 2. ‘ And ye shall utterly destroy all the places wherein the nations that ye shall possess served their gods, upon high mountains, and upon hills, and under green trees. And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire. And ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of their places.’ No idolater was permitted to live in the country of the Hebrews, which was appropriated to the worship of the one true God; and every Jew conforming to the heathen worship was to be put to death without mercy. It is to be observed, however, that the Israelites were not directed to propagate

gate their religion by the sword, and compel other nations to conform to their worship. Their conquests, and the extirpation of idolatrous worship were confined to the boundary of the land of Canaan, the country promised by God to Abraham. Accordingly when David, who had more zeal for his religion than any of the kings of Israel, conquered all the neighbouring nations, he did not compel any of them to change their religion for his.

5. The characters of the principal of the heathen gods we have seen to have been stained with vices of the grossest kind, and the most abominable rites were practised in their groves, and the temples themselves, as peculiarly proper for their worship. The reverse of every thing of this kind is always represented by Moses, and the prophets, as the disposition of the God of the Hebrews. Nothing of impurity, or indecency, was admitted into his worship. Nay the great object of the whole system of the Hebrew religion was to form men to the perfection of moral

ral

ral character; and all the rites and ceremonies of it are constantly said to be wholly insignificant without this. *Be ye holy*, says Moses, Lev. xix. 2. *for the Lord your God is holy.*

When the Psalmist describes the character of the man who was acceptable to God, and fit to be admitted to his presence, he says, (Psalm xv. 1.) *Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle, who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart.* On the other hand, vice and wickedness is always represented as the great, and indeed the sole, object of his displeasure. *There is no peace, says God, to the wicked*, Is. vi. 22.

The insignificance of all merely ritual observances, in which the whole of the heathen religion consisted, compared with moral virtue, is expressed in the most emphatical manner by several of the sacred writers as Is. i. 11. ‘To what purpose is  
‘the multitude of your sacrifices to me,  
‘saith the Lord? I am full of the burnt-  
p ‘offerings

‘ offerings of rams, and the fat of fed  
‘ beasts, and I delight not in the blood of  
‘ bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.  
‘ When ye come to appear before me,  
‘ who hath required this at your hand, to  
‘ tread my courts. Bring no more vain  
‘ oblations. Incense is an abomination unto  
‘ me. The new moons, and sabbaths,  
‘ the calling of assemblies, I cannot away  
‘ with. It is iniquity, even the solemn  
‘ meeting. Your new moons, and your  
‘ appointed feasts, my soul hateth. They  
‘ are a trouble unto me, I am weary to  
‘ hear them. And when ye spread forth  
‘ your hands, I will hide mine eyes from  
‘ you, yea when ye make many prayers  
‘ I will not hear. Your hands are full of  
‘ blood. Wash ye, make you clean, put  
‘ away the evil of your doings from be-  
‘ fore mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn  
‘ to do well, seek judgment, relieve the  
‘ oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for  
‘ the widow. Come now and let us rea-  
‘ son together saith the Lord, though your  
‘ sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white

‘ as

‘ as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

‘ Wherewith,’ saith Micah, ch. vi. 6.  
‘ shall I come before the Lord, and bow  
‘ myself before the high God. Shall I come  
‘ before him with burnt offerings, with  
‘ calves of a year old? will the Lord be  
‘ pleased with thousands of rams, or ten  
‘ thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my  
‘ first born for my transgression, the fruit of  
‘ my body for the sin of my soul? He hath  
‘ shewed thee, O man, what is good, and  
‘ what doth the Lord require of thee, but  
‘ to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk  
‘ humbly with thy God.” Passages equally excellent, and as purely moral as these, abound in the scriptures of the Old Testament.

6. The public festivals of the heathen gods were seasons of rioting and lewdness, but those of the Israelites were scenes of innocent rejoicing, joined with acts of devotion, which are by no means incompatible with it; and every thing relating to the service of the tabernacle and the temple,

ple, was conducted with the greatest regard to decency; while the utmost abhorrence is expressed for the horrid customs of the heathens. ‘Thou shalt not, says Moses, Deut. xii. 29. ‘inquire after their ‘gods, saying how did those nations serve ‘their gods, even so will I do likewise. ‘Thou shalt not do so unto the Lord ‘thy God. For every abomination to the ‘Lord, that he hateth, have they done ‘unto their gods. For even their sons and ‘their daughters have they burned in the ‘fire to their gods.’ And yet this very thing, which is here mentioned as the greatest enormity in the worship of the heathens, viz. human sacrifices, Voltaire says was practised in that of the Jews. Is it possible for effrontery to go farther than this? (except indeed his maintaining that the Jews were canibals, and fed on human flesh) while without any evidence, but his own, and contrary to every representation of the facts by heathen writers themselves, he speaks of the heathen festivals as mere seasons of perfectly innocent festivity. But,  
justly

justly or unjustly, every thing not Jewish must be harmless, and their religion must be, as he calls it, a *detestable superstition*.

7. While the religion of the Hebrews was free from every stain of impurity, it contained nothing of unnecessary austerity. It had no painful rite, except that of circumcision, which, being performed on children of eight days old, who can have no apprehension of the thing before hand, and whose wounds soon heal, is a very trifling inconvenience. The Hebrews had only one fast, and that of no more than a single day in the year, but three festivals of some continuance.

In the principal of the heathen festivals there was first a solemn mourning, all the people performing whatever was customary at funerals, or in seasons of great calamity. They tore their hair, shaved their heads, and mangled their flesh. But the Israelites were expressly forbidden to do any of those things, Deut. xiv. 1. ‘Ye  
‘ are the children of the Lord your God.  
‘ Ye shall not cut yourselves, nor make any  
‘ baldness

‘ baldness between your eyes for the dead,  
‘ (that is for idolatrous uses) for ye are an  
‘ holy people to the Lord your God.’  
These directions had no view to private  
mournings, for on those occasions they al-  
ways did these very things, but to the  
worship of God.

It was the custom of the heathens to  
imprint on their skin various indelible  
marks, being figures and characters ex-  
pressive of their devotedness to their gods,  
which must have been a painful operation.  
But this was also forbidden to the He-  
brews, Lev. xix. 27. ‘ Ye shall not make  
‘ any cuttings in your flesh for the dead,  
‘ nor print any marks upon you, I am the  
‘ Lord.’

8. If the extreme of austerity was  
with so much care avoided in the Hebrew  
institutions, that of sensual indulgence was  
avoided with more. Every incentive to  
lewdness, which was encouraged, and  
openly practised, in the heathen temples,  
was far removed from the worship of Je-  
hovah. The heathens were fond of wor-  
shipping

shipping on the tops of mountains, and in groves, in which every species of abomination was committed; and for this reason both were forbidden in the Hebrew worship, Deut. xvi. 21. ‘Thou shalt not plant  
‘ thee a grove near to the altar of the  
‘ Lord thy God, which thou shalt make  
‘ unto him.’

In the rites of some of the heathen deities men were habited like women, and women like men. This was more especially the case in the worship of Venus. This manner of worship was also common among the Syrians, and Africans, and thence it passed into Europe, the Phœnicians having brought it to Cyprus. In a religious rite of the Argives, Plutarch says the women were clothed like men, and men like women. But in the laws of Moses it is said, Deut. xxii. 5. ‘The wo-  
‘ man shall not wear that which appertain-  
‘ eth unto man, neither shall a man put on  
‘ a woman’s garment. For all that do so  
‘ are an abomination to the Lord thy God.’

You

You have seen that the heathens had places adjoining to their temples, in which both men and women prostituted themselves in honour of their deities, and to augment the revenues of the place. With a view, no doubt, to this abominable custom, the Hebrews were commanded to avoid these practices. Lev. xix. 9. ‘ Do not  
 ‘ prostitute thy daughter, to cause her to  
 ‘ be a whore, lest the land fall into whore-  
 ‘ dom, and the land become full of wick-  
 ‘ edness. Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and  
 ‘ reverence my sanctuary, I am the Lord  
 ‘ your God.

9. A superstitious respect for the heathen temples and altars made them asylums for all kinds of criminals, and it was deemed the greatest act of impiety to take any person from thence, whatever his guilt had been, and however clear the proof of it. But this was not the case in the religion of the Hebrews, which Voltaire represents as the extreme of the most detestable superstition. Ex. xxi. 12. ‘ He that  
 ‘ smiteth a man so that he die, shall surely  
 ‘ be

‘ be put to death. If a man lie not in wait,  
‘ but God deliver him into his hand, then  
‘ will I appoint thee a place whither he  
‘ shall flee. But if a man come presump-  
‘ tuously upon his neighbour, and slay him  
‘ with guile, thou shalt take him from  
‘ mine altar, that he may die.” Where  
then do we find the proper characters of  
superstition, and where are those of good  
policy and good sense?

## DISCOURSE VI.

### *The excellence of the Mosaic Institutions.*

---

Behold I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them. For this is your wisdom and understanding, in the sight of the nations which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so near unto them as the Lord your God is, in all things that ye call upon him for; and what nation is there so great that hath statutes and judgments so righteous, as all this law which I set before you this day.

DEUT. iv. 5---8.

IN my last Discourse I began to give you a general view of the religious institutions of Moses, corresponding to that which, in two preceding Discourses, I gave you of the religion of the heathens, to which they were opposed: in order to enable you to judge whether it was probable that the former were devised by  
men,

men, or were of divine origin. You have seen that, in a variety of important respects, the religion of the Hebrews, said by unbelievers to be a barbarous and superstitious people, had doctrines and rites infinitely superior to those of the heathens. I particularly mentioned the great doctrine of the Scriptures concerning the unity of God, in opposition to the multiplicity of heathen deities, his being represented as having no definite form, so as to be worshipped under any image, his attributes of creating and governing the world, his omnipresence, omniscience, and infinite wisdom, the perfection of his moral character, and his making the strictest virtue the great end of his worship. I mentioned the decency of all the religious festivals of the Hebrews, as the reverse of the licentiousness encouraged in those of the heathens, and at the same time their freedom from any unnecessary or painful austerity, and the peculiar abhorrence in which human sacrifices, and other rites of the heathen worship were held by the Hebrews.

I also

I also observed that the Hebrew altars afforded no asylum for criminals, which those of the heathens constantly did.

10. I now proceed to observe that, whereas much of the attention of the heathen nations was taken up with the superstitious practice of *divination*, in a great variety of forms, with witchcraft and necromancy; these being essential parts of their religion, and more studied than any other (so that at Rome to despise the established *auguries* would have been reckoned the extreme of profaneness) the Hebrews of all the ancient nations, were entirely exempt from this wretched superstition, the offspring of the most extreme ignorance, though they knew no more of philosophy, or the true causes of events, than other people. Every branch of this superstition was strictly forbidden to the Israelites, as well as things of greater enormity. Lev. xix. 26. ‘Neither shall ye use enchantments, nor observe times,’ Deut. xviii. 10. ‘There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass

‘ pass through the fire, or that useth divi-  
‘ nation, or an observer of times, or an  
‘ enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or  
‘ a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wi-  
‘ zard, or a necromancer. For all that  
‘ do these things are an abomination unto  
‘ the Lord, and because of these abomi-  
‘ nations the Lord thy God doth drive them  
‘ out from before thee. Thou shalt be  
‘ perfect with the Lord thy God. For  
‘ these nations which thou shalt possess  
‘ hearkened unto observers of times, and  
‘ unto diviners; but as for thee, the Lord  
‘ thy God hath not suffered thee so to do.’  
Is this any mark of the detestable supersti-  
tion, with which Voltaire charges the  
religion of the Jews? On the contrary,  
it is such good sense, as we in vain look  
for in the religions of other nations, that  
this writer represents as in all respects  
their superior.

Considering the very strong hold that  
these opinions and practices still have on  
the minds of men (for to this day many  
christians, and even many unbelievers in  
christianity,

christianity, have great faith in charms, and other things of a similar nature, relating to good or bad fortune, as insignificant as the sailors whistling for a wind) there is not a clearer and more unequivocal mark of superior, of divine wisdom, than the contempt that is so strongly expressed for every thing of this kind in the books of Moses, especially considering the times in which they were written.

II. The heathens had many superstitious rules with respect to *sacrifices*. Thus hogs were sacrificed to Ceres, an owl to Minerva, a hawk to Apollo, a dog to Hecate, an eagle to Jupiter, a horse to the sun, a cock to Æsculapius, a goose to Isis, and a goat to Bacchus: The Zabians sacrificed to the sun seven bats, seven mice, and seven other reptiles. The Egyptians were so far from sacrificing horned cattle, that they worshipped them, as also the ram. The Hebrews alone kept to the natural and rational idea of sacrifices, which was to confine them to things most proper for the food of man, in order to  
express

exprefs their gratitude to God, as the giver of it, and, as it were, to be the guefts at his table.

That facrifices, though not required of Chriftians, was a natural mode of worship cannot be denied, becaufe they were univerfal, and are ufed by all heathen nations to this day. No philofopher, in the moft enlightened period of the heathen world, ever objected to them.

The heathens were ufed to referve fome of the flefh of the animals they facrificed for fuperftitious ufes, as the chriftians, when fuperftition crept in among them, did of the confecrated bread in the eucharift. For the chriftians derived all their fuperftitious practices from the heathens. When the Mahometans facrifice a fheep, as they always do on their pilgrimage to Mecca, they dry a great part of the flefh, which by this means may be kept two years, and make presents of it to their friends at their return. This was probably an antient idolatrous cuftom, which Mahomet kept up. But to prevent every

every superstitious use of sacrifices, the Hebrews were directed to keep nothing of theirs till the next day ; and no flesh of the paschal lamb was to be carried out of the house in which it was eaten. They were also strictly forbidden to eat any part of it raw, *Exod. xii. 9.* which has been observed to have been a superstitious and indecent custom with the Egyptians, and others.

12. Some part of the first fruits of their harvests were reserved by the heathens for magical purposes. On the contrary, the Israelites were directed, when they presented their first fruits, to recount the goodness of God to them in the following pious form. *Deut. xxvi.* in the presence of the priest. ‘ I profess this  
‘ day unto the Lord thy God, that I am  
‘ come unto the country which the Lord  
‘ fware unto our fathers for to give us.”  
When the priest had taken the basket out of his hand, and presented it, he was to say farther. ‘ A Syrian ready to perish  
‘ was my father, and he went down into  
‘ Egypt,

‘ Egypt, and sojourned there, with a few,  
‘ and there became a great nation, mighty  
‘ and populous, and the Egyptians evil  
‘ intreated us, and afflicted us, and laid  
‘ upon us hard bondage, and when we  
‘ cried unto the Lord God of our fathers  
‘ the Lord heard our voice, and looked on  
‘ our affliction, and our labour, and our  
‘ oppression. And the Lord brought us  
‘ forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand,  
‘ and an outstretched arm, and with great  
‘ terribleness, and with signs, and wonders;  
‘ and he hath brought us into this place,  
‘ and hath given us this land, even a land  
‘ that floweth with milk and honey; and  
‘ now behold I have brought the first  
‘ fruits of the land which thou, O Lord,  
‘ hast given me.’

When some of the antient idolaters had gathered all their fruits, they took a kid and boiled it in its mother’s milk, and with magical rites sprinkled with it their fields, gardens, and orchards, thinking that by this means they would become fruitful. This practice was expressly for-

bidden to the Hebrews, no doubt, as superstitious and idolatrous. ‘Thou shalt not feed a kid in its mother’s milk.’ (Exod. xxiii. 19. Deut. xiv. 21.) To this custom it is not improbable that Isaiah, alludes, when speaking of idolaters, he says (Chap. lxxv. 4.) ‘Who eat swine’s flesh, and broth of abominable things is in their vessels.’ For they might put other things into the pot along with the flesh of the kid. And on this account, when they had distributed their tythes, they were directed to say, (Deut. xxvi. 13.) ‘I have brought away the hallowed things out of mine house, and also have given them to the Levite, and unto the stranger, to the fatherless, and to the widow, according to all thy commandments, which thou hast commanded me. I have not transgressed thy commandments, neither have I forgotten them. I have not eaten thereof in my mourning (alluding to the solemn mourning in the festival of Isis) neither have I taken away ought thereof for any unclean

‘ clean use, nor given ought thereof for  
‘ the dead,’ (that is for idolatrous purposes)  
‘ but I have hearkened to the voice of the  
‘ Lord my God, and have done according  
‘ to all that thou hast commanded me. Look  
‘ down from thy holy habitation, from  
‘ heaven, and bless thy people Israel, and  
‘ the land which thou hast given us, as thou  
‘ swarest unto our fathers, a land that  
‘ floweth with milk and honey.” Here  
certainly is piety and good sense, and no-  
thing of that *detestable superstition*, which  
Voltaire ascribes to this antient people.

13. The rules laid down in the books  
of Moses for the *diet* of the Israelites,  
permitting the use of some kinds of food,  
and prohibiting others, will, no doubt,  
be deemed superstition by some persons.  
But if the particulars be considered, it will  
be found that the Israelites were confined  
to that food which was the most wholesome,  
and best suited to the climate they were  
destined to inhabit. On the contrary,  
there was real and mere superstition in the  
restrictions that many of the heathens laid

themselves under in this respect, and in all antient nations religion was concerned in the choice of food. Thus the Egyptians would not eat the flesh of a cow. It was commonly said of them, they would as soon eat that of a man. Their priests, and the Pythagoreans, who followed them in it, abstained from beans. The priests in Syria ate no fish, the Phœnicians no pigeons, and the antient Arabians abstained from eating a variety of things, because they thought them particularly consecrated to some of the heavenly bodies, which were the objects of their worship, and because they made use of them in their divinations. Moses, therefore, or rather God by him, in order to counteract and prevent this superstition, (for it cannot be called any thing else, as the things refrained from cannot be denied to be wholesome food,) established a distinction of meats on a quite different, and perfectly rational, principle.

The article that will perhaps be most objected to is the prohibition to eat *swines flesh*, which we find not to be unwholesome. But  
the

the Egyptians, Arabians, and all the eastern nations, from Ethiopia to India, detest swines flesh, and so do the Mahometans universally. As to *blood*, I believe it is generally allowed to be gross and unwholesome food; but probably the principal reason why it was forbidden to the Hebrews, was the use that was made of it in some of the sacrifices of the heathen nations, who drank of the blood, by way of communicating with the infernal deities. For this reason too, it might be that, in the Hebrew sacrifices, the blood was directed to be sprinkled on the altar, or poured out at the foot of it. The blood was also considered as, in a peculiar manner, the seat of animal life; and by giving it back, as it were, to God, they acknowledged that it came from him.

14. There is, indeed, hardly any species of superstition that was practised by the antient idolaters that is not either directly noticed, or alluded to, and particularly guarded against, in the religion of the Israelites. The Zabians, it is said, constructed

ed certain images, according to the constellations, which they called *talisman*s, by means of which they expected to perform the greatest wonders, and especially to foretel future events. These were probably the *teraphim* of which mention is made in the Hebrew scriptures; and it is well known that the use of them was condemned by Moses; and the Israelites were directed to other means of becoming acquainted with such future events, as it was proper for them to be informed of. But this I shall make the subject of a separate discourse.

There are several things in the Hebrew ritual for which we are not at present able to give any satisfactory reason. But this is probably owing to our not being sufficiently acquainted with remote antiquity, and especially the worship of the most antient idolaters, which it was the great object of the Mosaic institutions to oppose. For this reason, and perhaps, in some cases, for no other, the customs of the Israelites were ordered to be the very reverse

verse of those of other nations. When the heathens worshipped their superior divinities, who were supposed to have their residence above the clouds, they did it not only on mountains, and in high places, but on high altars, thinking that by that means they had a nearer access to the objects of their worship. For this reason the Hebrews were directed not to build such altars, or to worship in such places. The heathens used *leaven* and *honey*, in the cakes which they offered to their gods, whereas in those of the Israelites they were both forbidden, but they were always to use *salt*. The heathens bowed towards the East, as an act of homage to the rising sun; and therefore their temples were made to front the West, that when they entered them, which they always did bowing, it might be towards the East. For this reason the tabernacle and temple of the Israelites were made to look to the East, that on entering them, the worshippers might bow towards the West, turning their backs on the place of sun rising.

The

The antient idolaters held *heifers* in peculiar veneration, and for this reason perhaps, it was ordered, (Deut. xxi. 3.) that if any person was found murdered, and the murderer could not be discovered, a heifer which had not been used to the yoke should be slain in his place. It was not sacrificed, but its head was to be struck off. The Egyptians held in peculiar abhorrence animals that had *red hair*, which they supposed to have been that of Typhon. In opposition, perhaps, to this, the Israelites were commanded to prepare their water of purification with the ashes of a red heifer, without spot, or perfectly red. Numb. xix.

15. Many unbelievers think that wherever there are *priests*, there must be *priestcraft*, and of course the interest of the people sacrificed to their emolument; it being always, as they think, in the power of that order of men to impose upon the rest. But there were several circumstances in the situation of the Hebrew priests, which shew that they could have had no such power.

In

In the first place, the Hebrew priests had no *secrets*. Every thing that they knew or that they did, was as well known to the whole nation as to themselves. It was all detailed in the books of the law, which were not confined to themselves, as the sacred books of the Hindoos are to the Bramins, but directed to be read in the hearing of all the people. To these books they always had access, and the Levites were dispersed all over the country, that they might with the more advantage instruct the people in them.

So far was Moses from wishing that the priests should have any advantage over the people by their superior knowledge, that his exhortations to all the people to make themselves accurately acquainted with the law are peculiarly emphatical, (Deut. vi. 6.) *These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.*  
And

*And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.* Had the Israelites observed this excellent precept, they could never have revolted, as they did, from their own religion to that of the neighbouring nations. It were to be wished that Christians would observe this excellent rule, or adopt the spirit of it. There would not then be so many unbelievers as there now are in Christian countries.

There was indeed, a part of the tabernacle, and of the temple, into which only the priests entered, and another into which the high priest only entered. But there was nothing deposited in those places, or done in them, but what was perfectly well known to the whole nation, and they did not, and could not, pretend to derive any extraordinary powers from their having access to those particular places. Whereas, in all the antient heathen religions, there were *mysteries* or *secrets*, with which only the

the initiated were acquainted, and which were communicated to them under the most solemn oath of secrecy. Which of these institutions then, bears most of the marks of priestcraft?

In the next place, though the Hebrew priests were of a particular family, and considered as the most respectable order of persons in the nation, as being more immediately employed in the service of God, they could have no landed property, and without this they could never attain any great degree of civil power; and in fact their judges, who were occasionally appointed to direct the civil power, and the kings, who held it permanently, were never of the order of priests, till the time of the Maccabees, which was a long time after the Babylonish captivity, when they had departed very far from their original plan of government.

However, the priests of Israel were not so far a separate order of men, but they were capable of civil offices. They were also married, and so much mixed with the  
rest

rest of the people, that they could have no interest separate from theirs. Their chief dependance was upon the tythes which they received from the people, who by this means had them completely in their power. By this means, however, it was wisely provided that it should be their interest to instruct the people in the law, and keep them to the observance of it. But when the priests and Levites did their duty in this respect, and received all the advantages they could from it, it does not appear that the tribe of Levi, which comprehended the family of the priests, the descendants of Aaron, was upon the whole so well provided for as any of the other tribes. The Levites in general must have been poor; for when mention is made of charity, the case of the Levite is generally recommended together with that of the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. Indeed some part of the tythes, as you have seen, were given to all these without distinction. Jacob, who foretold the future condition of all his sons, speaks  
of

of the Levites as well as the Simeonites, as under a kind of curse. For he says of them, Gen. xlix. 7. *Cursed be their anger for it was fierce, and their wrath for it was cruel. I will divide them in Jacob, and separate them in Israel.* This was a punishment for their treachery, and cruelty with respect to the inhabitants of Sichem.

Whatever advantage the Hebrew priests were possessed of, it must have depended upon their keeping the people to the strict observance of their religion. But in this they notoriously failed (which is an abundant proof that their influence was not great) through the strong predilection of the Israelites in favour of the religions of the neighbouring nations; and many times, but more especially during the reign of Ahab, the priests of Baal had far more influence than the priests or prophets, of Jehovah. Elijah was then the only prophet who made his appearance, while the priests of Baal including those of the groves, or rather of Astaroth or Astarte, were eight hundred and fifty (see 1 Kings, xviii.

19.) and there were not more than seven thousand persons in all the country who were not worshippers of Baal (1 Kings xix. 18.) At the same time the influence of the court, and of the nobles, was in favour of that foreign religion. As to the priests of Jehovah, there is no mention made of them in any transactions of those times, so that they could not have been at all conspicuous. Whatever, therefore, of priestcraft there was at that time in the country, it must have been in the hands of the priests of Baal, and not of those of Jehovah.

16. In all antient states, religion and political institutions had a very near connection. With the Hebrews, there was a peculiar reason for its being so. They were a nation separated from all others, for the sole purpose of preserving in the world the knowledge and worship of the one true God, in a time of universal defection from it, and they were made to depend upon the providence of God, more immediately than other nations, God, according

according to their original constitution, being their proper King, or supreme civil magistrate. He was *their God*, and they were *his people* in a peculiar sense. In his address to them, when they had left Egypt, he says, *Exod. xix. 4. Ye have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me. For all the earth is mine. And ye shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.* He also says, *Exod. xxv. 8. Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.* Agreeably to this, when, in imitation of the neighbouring nations, they wished to have a king, it was considered as a rejection of the government of God, to which they had been subject, and therefore God says to Samuel on the occasion, *1 Sam. viii. 7. They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.* Under the immediate government of God, that of the Hebrews was an equal republic, while all the neighbouring

bouring nations were governed by kings, and in the most arbitrary manner. What could have led Moses to think of such an excellent mode of government as this? He could not have seen, or heard, of any thing resembling it. For at that time no such thing existed in any part of the world.

The religion and civil government of the Hebrews having this intimate connection, I shall mention some particulars of the latter, that we may see whether it was so very barbarous and absurd a system as Voltaire and other unbelievers represent it to have been, and whether the civil institutions of other antient nations bear greater marks of wisdom and liberality. But on this subject I mean to be very brief.

The great object of the institutions of several of the antient nations was *offensive war*, and *conquest*. That of the Hebrews was simply *agriculture*, which is certainly the most natural and rational object, leading to the happiest state of human society. Foreign commerce was not encouraged, on account of the danger that was to be  
apprehended

apprehended with respect to their religion, from an intercourse with foreign and idolatrous nations. And as a purely agricultural, and not a commercial nation, they were forbidden to take any interest for money lent to one another.

In order to attach them to the lands of their inheritance, the Hebrews had in their laws an excellent provision unknown in any other, viz. their reverting to the family of the original proprietors at the year of Jubilee, which was every half century, at which time also any contract which a Hebrew might make to bind himself to servitude was dissolved. By this means it was not in the power of the most improvident spendthrift intirely to ruin his family. He could only mortgage his possession for a limited time, nor could there be any instance of a permanently excessive landed property. What an excellent institution was this for preserving a reasonable equality among this people, the only security for liberty, and also for creating an attachment to the soil, and of course the

love of their country, in which all history shews that no nation ever exceeded, or equalled, the Jews.

Beyond the boundary of the land of Canaan, which was promised by God to their ancestors, and of which they got possession not by any power of their own, but by the immediate hand of God, they were not to attempt any conquest. All their wars were to be defensive, and when they took arms to repel an invasion, they were ordered in the first place to propose terms of peace. In case of success in war, and when, in consequence of it, they marched into the country of the enemy, they were required to do no unnecessary injury to it; and especially not to cut down the fruit trees, and to spare all who did not bear arms.

Every Israelite of an age capable of bearing arms was, as in all antient nations, obliged to join the army; but at the head of it a proclamation was directed to be made, excusing every person who had either lately married a wife, built a house,  
or

or planted a vineyard, which would naturally make him more attached to life. Even if any man felt himself on any other account fearful and faint hearted, he might return home. It is in vain that we look for maxims of such moderation, and good sense, in any other antient nation.

The great strength of any country consists in its population, and such were the principles of the Israelites, that with them beyond all other nations, celibacy was deemed to be a misfortune, barrenness a reproach, and a multitude of children the greatest blessing. But in heathen nations many persons devoted themselves to a single life as an act of religion; as the Vestal Virgins among the Romans. They were heathen principles and practices that led to the system of monks and nuns among Christians.

The Hebrew institutions allowed of servitude, but enjoined more humanity to slaves than those of any other nation. If a master, in beating his slave, struck out an eye, or even a tooth, he was obliged to

to set him free. Exod. xxi. 16. If a slave committed a capital offence, the judge, and not his master, was to pronounce the sentence. If the master wilfully murdered his slave, he was to suffer death. The Israelites were not permitted to use the captive women, who were of course slaves, at their pleasure. The law is so express on this subject, that I shall recite it. Deut. xxi. 10. *When thou goest forth to war against thine enemies, and the Lord thy God hath delivered them into thine hands, and thou hast taken them captive, and seest among the captives a beautiful woman, and hast a desire unto her, that thou wouldest have her to thy wife, thou shalt then bring her home to thy house, and she shall shave her head, and pare her nails, (as it is in our translation; but the meaning is that she should make them beautiful by colouring them, which is at this time done in the East, and considered as a great article of beauty,) and she shall put the raiment of her captivity from off her, and shall remain in thine house, and bewail her father and her mother a full month; and after that thou shalt go in*  
*unto*

*unto her, and she shall be thy wife. And it shall be if thou have no delight in her, then thou shalt let her go whither she will, but thou shalt not sell her at all for money, thou shalt not make merchandise of her, because thou hast humbled her.* We shall find no law approaching to the humanity of this among the Greeks or Romans, a thousand years after this time, and still less among nations of greater antiquity. How little will the treatment of slaves by Europeans bear to be compared with this?

Voltaire charges the Jews with a violent hatred of all other nations; but let us attend to their original laws and institutions on this subject, Deut. xxii. 8. *If a stranger sojourn with you in your land, ye shall not vex him, but the stranger shall dwell with you. He shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself. For ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God. The Lord loveth the stranger.* Exod. xxii. 22. Many antient nations made great difficulties about the naturalization of foreigners; but among the Hebrews  
any

any person, being circumcised, and conforming to the laws of the land, became one of themselves in all respects. Only, for particular reasons, persons of certain nations could not be completely naturalized till after the expiration of a certain number of generations.

In all antient nations, and many modern ones, *torture* was made use of both in the punishment of crimes, and for procuring evidence. But no use whatever was made of it among the Hebrews. Punishment by scourging was limited to forty stripes, murder and some other atrocious crimes were punished with death, but executions were performed by stoning or hanging, and the body buried before sunset. Where, then, are those “cruel and torturous executions, and that unrelenting “vindictiveness” which Mr. Paine says contribute to make him consider the Bible as “the word of a demon rather than the “word of God,” and which makes him “detest it,” as he says “he detests every “thing that is cruel.” They have no  
existence

existence whatever, but in his own imagination. How easy is it to calumniate what a man does not understand, and what he is strongly predisposed to dislike and misrepresent. In cases of mere manslaughter, a city of refuge was provided, in which the innocent author of the death of another, was safe from the pursuit of the relations of the deceased. Theft was punished by restitution, by fine, or slavery, but not with death.

Such, my brethren, is the general outline, and some of the principal features, of that system of religion, and civil policy, which Voltaire treats as most execrable; but judge for yourselves with what justice. On the contrary, I have no doubt but that, if all the circumstances of the Hebrew nation, and of other antient and neighbouring nations, could be known, we should be satisfied that it was, in all respects, the best system possible, as much superior to any of those of human invention, as the works of nature are superior to those of art.

## DISCOURSE VII.

*The Principles of the Heathen Philosophy  
compared with those of Revelation.*

---

The world by wisdom knew not God.

I. COR. i. 21.

IN my two last discourses I shewed you how greatly superior were the religious institutions of Moses, though so much decried by modern unbelievers, to those of the heathens, the shocking enormities, and gross abominations, of which are so much disguised and smoothed over by them. But because it will be said that what I then exhibited was only the system of *superstition*, adopted by the *vulgar*, and that the more intelligent persons among the heathens (though for political reasons, they did not chuse to oppose, and even countenanced it) held a more rational system, I shall  
now

now show you what that more rational system was.

For this purpose I shall lay before you and in as intelligible a manner as I can, (for I will not undertake to make the two discourses which, it will be necessary for me to give on this subject, perfectly intelligible to *all*) what it was that the philosophers among the antients really thought concerning the system of nature, and the government of the world, and also concerning the nature of man, and his future destination, with some of their ideas concerning the principles of morals, that you may compare them with those that are advanced in the scriptures. And if it appear that those are more consonant to reason, it will afford a considerable presumption that they were of divine origin. For how can it be supposed that the authors of the books of scripture, who had no advantage of literature, and whom unbelievers treat with the greatest contempt, for their ignorance and barbarity, should have adopted a more rational system on these great subjects

jects than those who have been the most celebrated for their wisdom in the most polished and civilized nations in the world. It will be very easy to make this comparison, as there is sufficient evidence what the tenets of the antient philosophers were, many of their own writings being now extant, as well as the scriptures of the Old and New Testament.

1. It was a fundamental maxim with all the philosophers of antiquity, that *creation from nothing* was absolutely impossible; and many of those who admitted a principle of intelligence in the universe, maintained that *matter* in some confused chaotic mass was another principle, coeternal with it, and independent of it, and therefore could only be modified, but not destroyed by it. Moses on the contrary, asserts a proper *creation* of every thing that exists, antecedent to the *chaotic state* which he describes. Gen. i. 1. *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep.* And since the  
*properties*

*properties* of bodies are all that we know of them, the appointment and changing of *these*, which the philosophers admitted to be within the province of the intelligent principle, implies a power of proper *creation*, and proper *destruction*. For if we take away all the properties of any thing, nothing will be left. The system of Moses therefore, is more rational than theirs. This, however, continued to be the doctrine of the Greek philosophers to the latest period of their history. Plato held that matter existed coeternally with God. Also, according to Zeno, the founder of the stoical philosophy, “ there existed from  
“ all eternity a dark and confused chaos, in  
“ which were contained the principles of  
“ all future beings.”

2. Another set of philosophers, and perhaps of greater antiquity than the other, equally maintaining that creation from nothing was impossible, maintained that every thing, was originally emitted from the substance of the self-existent and supreme Being. And not only did they  
suppose

suppose that *intelligent* beings of all orders proceeded from him, by this mode of *emanation*, as rays of light from the sun; but that other substances of an inferior nature proceeding in the same manner from *them*, at last *matter* itself, the most remote from the divine essence, came into existence, and therefore that this substance, of which they speak with the greatest contempt, had its origin from the divine essence. This was the system of the Oriental philosophy, which is still found in Indostan, and other parts of the East, and from them was derived the doctrine of the *Gnostics*, by which Christianity was corrupted in the time of the apostles. I need not say how far this notion of the derivation of every thing from the substance of the divine Being, deviates from reason. There is certainly nothing so wild and absurd as this in the writings of Moses, who always supposes God to have created all things, but not by the projection of them from his own essence.

The

The same class of philosophers who held that every thing had been produced from the substance of the Supreme Being, also supposed that, after a certain period, they would be absorbed into it again; and as originally nothing had existed besides this self-existent being, he would again exist alone; but that after another period, other beings would be again produced from him, and that these successive revolutions would go on forever. This ever has been, and still is, the established doctrine in the East, and it was adopted by some of the Grecian philosophers, especially the Stoicks, who said that “ the world, including the whole  
“ compass of nature, both God and mat-  
“ ter, had subsisted from all eternity, and  
“ would for ever subsist; but that the  
“ present regular frame of nature had a  
“ beginning, and would have an end,  
“ from the alternate prevalence of *moisture*  
“ and *dryness*; that when the former pre-  
“ vails, all things are destroyed by an *in-*  
“ *undation*, and when the latter prevails,  
“ by a *conflagration*; that, however, from  
“ both

“ both of these catastrophe’s every thing  
“ will again emerge, by the energy of  
“ an efficient principle, when all the forms  
“ of regular nature will be renewed, but  
“ to be again dissolved, and again renewed,  
“ in an endless succession.”

This scheme excludes all idea of *melioration*. For according to it, every thing has been, and in all future revolutions ever will be, just what it now is. Accordingly Seneca says, that “ many persons  
“ would reject this restoration of being,  
“ were it not this restoration will be accompanied with a total oblivion of past  
“ events.” How far less rational, as well as less pleasing, is this system, than that of the scriptures, which supposes a constant tendency to a better state of things, every rational being retaining his separate consciousness, always distinct from the supreme Being, but making nearer approaches to him in perfection and happiness to all eternity. As to any proof, or evidence, of the truth of this philosophical system, of every thing having been produced  
by

by way of emanation from the divine essence, and being absorbed into it again, it is only this; that there cannot be *two* eternal principles, and therefore every thing that exists, must have been derived, immediately or mediately, from *one*, and this one must have been the spiritual and intelligent principle. But will any modern philosopher admit the validity of such an argument as this, and adopt the conclusion? It is universally rejected with contempt.

As to the *essence*, or *substance*, of the Supreme Being, from which they say that all things were derived, it is a question of no moment; since all that we have to do with are his *attributes*, as those of power, wisdom, and benevolence, in whatever it be that they may be said to reside. But according to our apprehensions, there is something degrading in the idea of his being of the same nature with all other beings, as he must be, if every thing was produced by mere protrusion from his substance. Zeno, however, supposed that both “the active and passive principles

“ples in nature,” that is, both *God*, and *matter*, “were alike corporeal, only that  
 “the former was a pure ether, or fire,  
 “occupying the external surface of the  
 “heavens, that is, a more attenuated kind  
 “of matter.” And Epicurus, conceiving the human form to be the most perfect, said that, “though the gods were of an  
 “ethereal substance, they were shaped  
 “like men.”

3. Both the classes of philosophers, whose opinions I have now described, admitted a principle of *intelligence* in the universe, and a real distinction between *God* and *matter*. But in later times this was by many denied, and some philosophers even proceeded so far as not to admit the existence of any such being as *God*, in any sense of the word. Sanchoiatho, explaining the philosophical system of the Phœnicians, says, that “the universe arose from the necessary energy  
 “of an eternal principle, active but without intelligence, upon the eternal passive  
 “chaotic mass.” This is supposed to  
 have

have been advanced in opposition to the principles of Moses; but certainly these will not suffer any thing by the comparison. If there be no marks of *intelligence*, that is, of *design*, in the universe, where shall we find them? not surely in the works of men. How much more just and noble are the sentiments and language of the Psalmist, Psalm civ. 24. *O Lord how manifold are thy works, in wisdom hast thou made them all.*

Aristotle did not in words deny the being of a God, but he supposed the universe to have existed from all eternity, independent of any wisdom or contrivance, of his. He only considered him as the ‘ main spring  
‘ of the whole machine, and therefore  
‘ properly a part of it, employed, in some  
‘ inexplicable manner, in communicating  
‘ motion to it.’ Strato of Lampfacus, a disciple of Aristotle, held that ‘ the world  
‘ was neither formed by the agency of the  
‘ deity, distinct from matter, nor by any  
‘ intelligent animating principle, but that  
‘ it arose from a force innate in matter,  
s originally

‘ originally excited by accident, and since  
 ‘ continuing to act according to the pecu-  
 ‘ liar qualities of natural bodies. He neither  
 ‘ denied nor asserted the existence of a di-  
 ‘ vine nature, but, in excluding all idea  
 ‘ of a deity from the formation of the  
 ‘ world, he indirectly excluded him from  
 ‘ his system.’

These atheistical doctrines were not confined to a single philosopher, or his disciples, many of them, and those of the greatest eminence, entertained the same, or similar, sentiments. Democrates held that ‘ the first principles of all things were  
 ‘ *atoms* and a *vacuum*, in which, by a natural  
 ‘ necessity, or fate, they perpetually move,  
 ‘ and that from their combinations arise  
 ‘ all the forms of things.’ Pythagoras, also  
 ‘ had held that ‘ motion is the effect of a  
 ‘ power essential to matter.’ Protagoras in one of his books, said concerning the gods;  
 ‘ I am unable to determine whether they  
 ‘ have any existence, or not. For the  
 ‘ weakness of the human understanding, and  
 ‘ the shortness of human life, with many  
 ‘ other

‘ other causes, prevent us from attaining  
‘ this knowledge.’ But Diagoras openly  
denied the existence of a deity. Heraclitus  
‘ made use of the term *God*, but not to  
‘ denote a distinct being of a peculiar na-  
‘ ture, but merely a *natural force* in that  
‘ primary *fire*, from which he supposed  
‘ all things to have proceeded, and by means  
‘ of which he supposed that its particles  
‘ had been in eternal motion, and at length  
‘ to have united, to form the present  
‘ system of nature. To this *force*, con-  
‘ sidered as distinct from *matter* on which  
‘ it acts, he applied the term *god*.’

Epicurus admitted a deity into his system, but it was chiefly to avoid popular odium. For he maintained that “ the  
“ universe always existed, and will always  
“ continue to exist ; for that there is no-  
“ thing by which it can be changed.  
“ There is nothing, he said, in nature, nor  
“ can there be conceived to be any thing,  
“ besides *body* and *space*; that the atoms,  
“ from which all things were composed,  
“ are not only all the materials of which

“ bodies are made, but that the *energy*, or  
“ *principle of motion*, which essentially be-  
“ longs to them, is the sole agent in the  
“ operations of nature.”

As the Oriental philosophers supposed that all things would be resolved into the divine essence, from which they originally sprung, Epicurus supposed that they would be resolved into their original atoms. “ The world,” he said, “ is preserved by  
“ the same mechanical causes by which it  
“ was framed, and from the same causes  
“ it will at last be dissolved. The incessant  
“ motion of the atoms which produced  
“ the world is continually operating to-  
“ wards its dissolution. For nothing is  
“ solid and indissoluble besides atoms;  
“ whence it may be concluded, that the  
“ time will come when nothing will re-  
“ main but the original atoms, and infinite  
“ space.”

Epicurus absolutely denied all *wisdom* in the construction of the universe, even in the most obvious instances. “ The  
“ parts of animals,” he said “ were not  
“ originally

“ originally framed for the uses to which  
“ they are now applied; but having been  
“ accidentally produced, they were after-  
“ wards accidentally employed. The eye,  
“ for example, was not made for seeing,  
“ nor the ear for hearing; but the soul  
“ being formed within the body, at the  
“ same time with the organs, and con-  
“ nected with them, could not avoid mak-  
“ ing use of them, in their respective  
“ functions.”

Can we attend to these things, and not be struck with the truth of the apostle's observation in my text, *the world by wisdom knew not God*. It was not even able to retain that knowledge of God which had been originally communicated to man. And how justly is their case described by the same apostle, in another passage, where he says, Rom. i. 21. *They became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened*. But are not their minds equally, or more, darkened, who can prefer the absurd conceits of these philosophers, to the rational doctrines of revelation?

tion? We shall, however, see more of the wanderings of the human imagination when left to itself, in what I have farther to observe.

4. The existence of *evil* always created the greatest difficulty to those who speculated concerning the origin and construction of the universe, and the causes of events. Indeed, so difficult is the question, that nothing but revelation could have solved it. In the scriptures we learn that *evil*, as well as *good*, is the appointment of the same great Being, but always for the most benevolent purposes. *Shall we receive good at the hand of God, says Job, chap. ii. 10, and shall we not receive evil? ch. i. 21. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, Blessed be the name of the Lord.* In Isaiah, xlv. 6, 7, *I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I the Lord do all these things.* All these evils, in the administration of this greatest and best of Beings, are subservient to good, as the Psalmist says, Ps. xcvi. 1, *The Lord reigneth*  
let

*let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of the isles be glad thereof. Clouds and darknefs are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.* But through these clouds and this darknefs, the heathens, by the help of their greatest wisdom could not see. Some of the antients, as the Persians, thought that there were *two independent principles* in nature, one the author of good, and the other of evil. The good principle they called *Oromazes*, and the evil *Arimanius*. The Egyptians also worshipped an evil principle under the name of *Typhon*.

The Greek philosophers in general considered *matter* as the cause of all evil. In their antient cosmogonies it is ascribed to *chaos*. Plato held that ‘there is in matter  
‘ a necessary but blind and refractory force,  
‘ from which arises a propensity to disorder  
‘ and deformity,’ which he said, ‘was the  
‘ cause of all the imperfection which is  
‘ found in the works of God;’ so that he appears to have thought that matter, from its nature, resists the will of the supreme artificer,

artificer, so that, on this account, he cannot perfectly execute his designs. Plato was also influenced by the argument from *contraries*. ‘It cannot be,’ he said, ‘that evil should be destroyed; for there must always be something contrary to good.’

The Stoics said that ‘evil was the necessary consequence of eternal *necessity*, to which the great whole, comprehending both God and matter, was subject.’ When Chrysippus was asked whether diseases were to be ascribed to divine providence, he replied, that ‘it was not the intention of nature that these things should happen, nor were they conformable to the will of the author of nature, and the parent of all good; but that, in framing the world, some inconvenience had adhered by necessary consequence to his wise and useful plan.’

How different is this from the sublime doctrine of the scriptures on this subject, as when we read, Psalm cxxxv. 23. *I know that the Lord is great, and that our Lord is above all gods. Whatever the Lord pleased*  
*that*

*that did he in heaven and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places.*

5. It is in vain that we look for the rational and sublime doctrine of an *universal providence* among the philosophers of antiquity. But according to the scriptures, there is no event, great or small, but what comes to pass according to the will of God. Dan. ii. 20. *Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever; for wisdom and might are his. He changeth the times and seasons, he removeth kings and setteth up kings.* The proud king of Assyria, in the midst of his conquests, is represented, Is. x. 5. as the *staff* in the hand of God. At the same time we are assured by our Saviour, Mat. x. 33. *that a sparrow falleth not to the ground without his will, and that the very hairs of our heads are numbered.* And this is true philosophy, for so connected are all the parts of the system, that the smallest things are as necessary as the greatest, and in many cases we cannot but see that the greatest things depend upon the smallest. Voltaire justly observes that had a particular stone been  
thrown

thrown with a little more force, it would have given a different turn to the whole history of the East. It was a stone by which Mahomet was knocked down, as he was engaged in battle, but not killed.

There is most of the appearance of the doctrine of a providence among the Stoics. But according to Zeno and Chrysippus, ‘there is in nature a *fate*, or an eternal and immutable series of causes and effects, within which all events are included, and to which the Deity himself is subject,’ though the later Stoics, who wrote after the promulgation of christianity, changed this *fate* into the *providence of the gods*.

Other philosophers did not pretend that God, or the gods, had, in any sense, or in any respect, the government of the world. According to Aristotle, the Deity, if it can be said that he believed in any proper deity, ‘is eternally employed in the contemplation of his own nature. He observes nothing (this philosopher says) he cares for nothing beyond himself. Residing in the first sphere, he possesses  
‘neither

‘neither immensity nor omnipresence.  
‘Removed from the inferior parts of  
‘the universe, he is not even a spectator  
‘of what is passing among its inhabitants,  
‘and therefore cannot be a proper object  
‘of worship.’

Epicurus, I have observed, said that there were gods, only to avoid popular odium. According to his own account of them, they were of no manner of use in creating or governing the world. “There are,” he said, “in the universe divine  
“natures, but that it is inconsistent with  
“our natural notions of the gods, as happy and immortal beings, to suppose that  
“they encumber themselves with the management of the world, or that they  
“are subject to the cares and passions  
“which must necessarily attend so great  
“a charge. We are not, therefore, to  
“conceive that the gods have any intercourse with mankind, or any concern  
“in the affairs of the world.” But, according to the scriptures, every thing is conducted by the Supreme Being, without trouble.

trouble. With respect to creation itself, it is said, *He spake and it was done, he commanded and it stood fast.* He said *Let there be light, and there was light*; and the government of the world, is no doubt, as easy to him as the creation of it. It is, in fact; a continuation of the same exertion, whatever that be. But no idea so sublime as this was ever entertained by any heathen philosopher.

It was the consideration of the immensity of the universe, and the idea men had of the multiplicity of cares that was necessary to the government of it, that led those of the philosophers who supposed that the world was in any sense, governed by superior Beings, to think it necessary to provide a great number of them, each to superintend his particular province. They had no conception of the sublime, but truly rational doctrine of the scriptures, according to which one intelligence, one mind, perfectly comprehends, and directs, the whole. And yet the uniformity we observe in the works of nature might have suggested

suggested the idea of one mind having arranged and directed the whole, immense as that whole is. But the amazing variety, and seeming discordancy, of many parts of the system prevented their perceiving their uniformity, nor could Moses, or any of the Hebrews, have been able to discover it of themselves.

6. Mention is made in the scriptures of *angels*, as created beings, superior to man; but they are never supposed to interfere in the affairs of men, except on particular occasions, and by the express appointment of the Supreme Being, never by their own voluntary agency. They are employed merely as *messengers* (for so their name in the Hebrew signifies) to convey the orders of the Almighty. But according to the system of all the philosophers, as well as that of the vulgar, among the heathens, there are beings inferior to the Supreme, who *at their own pleasure*, interfere in the affairs of men, and act according to their peculiar humours and passions.

Among

Among the Egyptians the idea of one supreme God was, from the earliest times, connected with the belief of inferior divinities, residing in the various parts of nature, whence arose the worship of those parts of nature. According to the mythology of the Greeks, those inferior deities sprung from chaos. Pythagoras supposed the region of the air to be peopled with these beings, whom he calls *gods*, *demons*, and *heroes*, according to their rank, these last approaching the nearest to the nature of man, ‘These,’ he said, ‘at their pleasure, by means of dreams and other instruments of divination, communicate to men the knowledge of future events, and the good demons are to be invoked by prayer.’ Socrates admitted the existence of beings ‘possessed of a middle nature between the Supreme Being and man; and to their agency he ascribed the ordinary phenomena of nature, and the particular conduct of human affairs; and he encouraged the practice of divination, under the notion that the gods sometimes discover future events to good men.’

Plato supposed that there were “ subordinate divinities appointed by the supreme Being, both to form the bodies of animals, and to superintend the affairs of the visible world.” Xenocrates, a disciple of Plato, taught that ‘ the heavens are divine, and the stars celestial gods, and that besides these divinities, there are terrestrial demons, of a middle nature between God and man, and partaking both of mind and body, like human beings, capable of passion, and liable to a diversity of character.’

Aristotle, who believed in no particular providence, yet supposed that there were ‘ intelligent natures inferior to the first mover, who presided over the lower celestial spheres.’

Though Democritus rejected the doctrine of a Supreme Deity, he admitted the popular belief of divinities inhabiting the aerial regions, saying that ‘ they made themselves visible to favoured mortals, and enabled them to foretell future events.’ He said, ‘ they were in form like men, but  
of

‘ of a larger size, and a superior nature;  
‘ being composed of the most subtle atoms,  
‘ and less liable to dissolution than human  
‘ beings, but nevertheless mortal.’ Accord-  
ing to the Stoics; ‘ portions of the ethe-  
‘ real soul of the world, being distributed  
‘ through all the parts of the universe, and  
‘ animating all bodies, there are inferior  
‘ gods and demons, with which all nature  
‘ is peopled. They conceived them, how-  
‘ ever, to be limited in their duration; re-  
‘ turning at length to their original, and  
‘ losing their separate existence.’

## DISCOURSE VIII.

*The Principles of the Heathen Philosophy  
compared with those of Revelation.*

### P A R T II.

---

The world by wisdom knew not God.

1 COR. i. 21.

HAVING given you a comparative view of the religion of the Hebrews, and that of the antient idolatrous nations, I began, in my last discourse, to give you a similar view of the principles of the *heathen philosophy*, that it might not be said that I took an unfair advantage, in relating nothing more than the opinions and practices of the vulgar among the heathens, instead of the real sentiments of the wisest among them. These, however, I shewed you were, in several respects, far less rational than those of the scriptures. I mentioned

T

their

their universal opinion of the impossibility of creation out of nothing, of the eternity and indestructibility, of matter ; its necessary evil tendency ; the doctrines of many of them, of the production of all inferior beings by emanation, or protrusion, from the substance of the deity, and their absorption into it again ; the absolute denial of the being of a God by many, and those some of the most eminent, of the Greek philosophers ; their various and unsatisfactory opinions concerning the origin of evil ; their denial of a divine providence, their belief of the existence of intelligent beings, inferior to the supreme, who at their pleasure, and contrary to the will of the Supreme Being, interfered in the direction of human affairs. I now proceed to observe,

7. If the heathen philosophers became so *vain in their imaginations*, when they speculated concerning the nature of *God*, and the origin and government of the universe, and were not able to retain the great truths which mankind had received by tradition relating to them, much more did they  
wander

wander in uncertainty and error, with respect to the doctrine of a *future state*, concerning which, as I have observed, the light of nature gives us no information at all. On this subject, so important that without it the doctrine concerning God and providence is merely a curious speculation, of no practical use, the principles of those philosophers who admitted a future state are totally discordant with those of the scriptures, which alone are agreeable to reason, though not discoverable by it. On this subject, I must be excused if I advance some things which will not be approved by the generality of Christians, who, in my opinion, have not intirely got rid of doctrines introduced into Christianity from a heathen source, from which have been derived almost all its corruptions.

According to the scriptures, the future state of man depends intirely upon a *resurrection*, to take place at a distant period, called the *last day*, and nothing is said concerning the rewards of the righteous, or the punishment of the wicked, antecedent

to that time. Our Saviour recommending acts of charity, says, (Luke xiv. 14) *Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just*, and on no occasion did he refer his hearers to any state of things prior to this. When he speaks of being *cast into hell*, it is with hands and eyes, which are members of the body; and the rich man in the parable is represented as with a tongue, tormented with burning thirst, though for the sake of some circumstances in the parable the future state is represented as taking place before the proper time.

The Apostle Paul, comforting the Thessalonians on the death of some of their friends, refers them only to the resurrection, and gives no hint of their enjoying any degree of happiness at the time that he was writing, which would have been unavoidable if, in his opinion, they *had* been happy then, 1. Theff. iv. 13. *I would not have you be ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are asleep, that ye sorrow not as those who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so also them that*  
*sleep*

*sleep in Jesus will God bring with him, and the dead in Christ shall rise first, that is, before any change take place on those who will be then alive. Why, indeed, did he use the term sleep, if, in his idea, the dead were not in a state of insensibility, and not to be awaked to life and action, but at the resurrection?*

Again, when the same apostle exhorts Christians to live sober, righteous, and godly lives, Tit. ii. 13. he directs them *to look for that blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, when he shall come again to raise the dead and judge the world.* When our Saviour says that he will receive the apostles to himself, he refers them to the same time, and nothing prior to it, John xiv. 3. *I will come again, and take you to myself, that where I am there ye may be also.* When, therefore, the apostle Paul speaks of being *absent from the body and present with the Lord*, he must have meant the same great period, overlooking all that passed between the time of his death and his resurrection, which  
indeed

indeed will only appear as a moment: as in the case of a man awaking from a profound sleep.

When Moses describes the formation of man, he represents him as made wholly, and not in part only, of the *dust of the ground*, and says after this, God put breath and life into him, thereby giving motion to the curious machine, which was before a lifeless mass. It is to this doctrine of Moses, that our Saviour refers, when he says that God is able *to destroy both body and soul*, or the power of life, *in hell*. For the word that is here rendered *soul*, is elsewhere rendered life, meaning that men, by killing the body, which God has been pleased to put in their power, cannot prevent its returning to life, this being in the power of God only. There is not, in reality, any more reason to suppose *life* to be a real substance, than *death*, which we nevertheless personify, when we say that *death comes*, and *surprises men*, and *takes them*. In the scriptures, both *death*, and *sin*, are personified.

The

The Gnostics, who were the first of the philosophers who embraced Christianity, could not divest themselves of their prejudices with respect to *matter*, as the source of all evil; and thinking it the happiest state of the soul, to be entirely detached from it, they explained away the doctrine of the *resurrection*, as to be understood of something that took place during life. To them the apostle Paul alludes, when he says, 2 Tim. ii. 18. that *they erred concerning the faith; saying that the resurrection was past already, and overturned the faith of some.* Justin Martyr, the first Christian writer after the apostolic age, whose works are come down to us, enumerating the particular tenets of the Gnostics, who were deemed to be *heretics*, and not allowed to be properly Christians; says of them, Dial. p. 2. ‘ They also say that there is no resurrection of the dead, but that immediately after death, souls are received into heaven. Do not take these to be Christians.’

This

This language of this antient and venerable writer, is not a little remarkable. Think not, however, that I approve of his harsh censure of the Gnostics. Others will say that they who reject the doctrine of a soul, are not Christians. Both are equally reprehensible. The Gnostics as well as Justin, believed the divine mission of Jesus, and a life of retribution after death, and many of them were martyrs as well as himself. The doctrine of a future life, is the most important article of Christian faith. The time, the place, or the manner, in which it will be effected, are all comparatively of little moment.

Though after this Christians in general adopted the doctrine of a soul distinct from the body, they thought that, after death, it remained in a place under ground, called *Hades*, where it waited for the resurrection of the body, when, and not before, it would be admitted to the immediate presence of God and of Christ, in heaven. This continued to be the faith of the Christian world, for about a thousand years. They  
pretty

pretty soon, however, made an exception in favour of the souls of the martyrs, which they thought went directly to heaven.

There are thought to be some traces of the doctrine of a resurrection in the heathen world, as among the Chaldeans and Zabbians. But if this was the case, the doctrine was soon obliterated, and speculative persons, thinking a proper *resurrection* to be absolutely impossible, and yet unwilling to give up all hope of some *future state*, imagined that there was some spiritual, or ethereal, principle in man, which having existed long before his birth, would subsist after his death. For with the heathens these two doctrines always went together; and Origen, one of the most learned of the early Christians, believed both the pre-existence of the soul, and its separate existence after death. Afterwards Christians in general abandoned the former, but retained the latter, though originally they were both derived from the same source.

But what evidence is there, from any appearances in nature, which is all that  
the

the heathens had to look to, on which their belief either of the pre-existence, or the separate existence of the soul is founded. The former will be allowed to have been wholly chimerical. But with respect to the latter, is it not evident that the power of thinking depends upon the brain; and if thought is suspended in the state of sound *sleep*, and during a *frown*, must it not be more effectually suspended in a state of *death*?

It will be said that we cannot conceive of any connection between the properties of perception or thought, and the idea of matter. But we know nothing at all of the connection of any properties with those of any substance whatever. Who can explain the connection between the magnet and the property of attracting iron, or the cause of the gravitation of all material substances towards each other? And what clearer ideas have we of the connection between the power of perception and thought with an *immaterial* substance any more than with a *material* one. Let

us then no longer cover our ignorance, or our fancied knowledge, with the repetition of mere words, to which we have no ideas, but confine ourselves to known *facts*, such as the strict connection between the powers of thought and the organization of the brain. When that is destroyed, sensation and thought cease; so that there cannot be any rational ground to expect the restoration of the one without the restoration of the other. And certainly the great Being who made man of the dust of the ground, can make him again, though reduced to the same dust. As to the *manner* in which this is to be effected, we know as much of the one as of the other; which is just nothing at all. But as the one has been effected by the same Being who has promised the other, we have no reason to entertain any doubt of its accomplishment at the time appointed.

The only rational hope of a future life must, therefore, be founded on the scripture doctrine of a *resurrection*, when the whole man, with all his powers, will  
be

be revived. That this doctrine of a resurrection is inconsistent with that of a soul, which survives the body, and retains all its faculties, not only unimpaired, but improved, (for such is the original and proper doctrine on the subject) is obvious to the slightest consideration. For if such be the condition of the soul, when freed from the clog and obstruction of the body, a resurrection would not only be unnecessary, but even undesirable. The two systems are, therefore, repugnant to each other, and cannot be rationally held together.

The doctrine of a soul, and consequently that of an intermediate state between death and the resurrection, has been the foundation of the worship of dead men and women, called saints, of the doctrine of purgatory, and many other doctrines of popery. These, and almost every other corruption of genuine christianity, came from the same heathen source, as I have shewn at large in my *History of the Corruptions of Christianity*.

The

The imagination of man being let loose in speculations on the origin and nature of souls, and their existence after death, we do not wonder at the wildest and most extravagant hypotheses on so obscure a subject. The general opinion of the philosophers was, that all souls, having been portions of the divine essence, or of the great soul of the world, and having contracted various impurities in their state of separation from their source, must pass through a course of purgation, by going through various animal bodies, before they could be reunited to the fountain from which they sprung, and to which they always tend.

The Egyptians, according to Herodotus, believed that when the body was decayed, the soul passed into that of some other animal, which was just then born, and that after it had made the circuit of beasts, birds, and fishes, through a period of three thousand years, it again became an inhabitant of a human body. They, therefore, endeavoured to delay this transmigration,

migration, by embalming the body, and thereby preserving it uncorrupted, and in a state fit for the residence of the soul, as long as possible.

Pythagoras, who borrowed his doctrines from the East, carried this of transmigration into Greece. He also held that of the final return of all souls into the eternal source from which they sprung. It does not, however, appear that the doctrine of transmigration, though still held in the East, remained long in Greece; but the doctrine of *pre-existence*, ever accompanied that of a *soul*, and on this principle, the Grecian philosophers believed its natural independence on the body, and its continued existence after its separation from it by death. Socrates held this doctrine, but either with some degree of doubt, or having no high opinion of the happiness of a future state\*. Plato represents him

as

\* The heathens in general, at least the Greeks, do not appear to have had any high idea of the happiness of the best of men after death. For Homer makes Achilles say to Ulysses,

as saying to his friends, who attended him at his trial, ‘whether it is better to live or die, was known only to the gods.’

Plato, though a disciple of Socrates, combined his doctrines with those of other philosophers, and had some peculiar ideas on this subject. These, on account of his great celebrity, I must not omit to mention, if it were only to shew what very absurd and extravagant notions the greatest of men have adopted when destitute of the light of revelation. He supposed that ‘there exists something between *God*, and ‘the *matter* of which the world was formed, which he calls *ideas*, existing in the ‘divine mind; and as external objects are ‘perceived by the *senses*, these can only be ‘perceived by the *intellect*.’ Sensible things, he said, ‘being in a state of continual ‘fluctuation, cannot be the object of ‘*science*, but these *ideas*, being permanent, ‘*may*, and by the contemplation of them,

Ulysses, when he found him in the Elysian fields, ‘I had ‘rather be a poor man, and serve another poor man, who ‘had himself a bare sufficiency of food, on earth, than rule ‘over all the dead.’

— ‘he

‘ he supposed that men might attain to a  
‘ kind of union with God, in whose mind  
‘ those ideas exist. He also supposed that  
‘ there is a *third substance*, composed of  
‘ spirit and matter, diffused through the  
‘ universe, and the animating soul of  
‘ the world; that the souls of men are  
‘ not derived immediately from God, but  
‘ from this soul of the world, which from  
‘ its origin was debased by a mixture of  
‘ material principle. He said that when  
‘ God formed the universe, he separated  
‘ from the soul of the world, a number of  
‘ inferior souls, equal in number to the  
‘ stars, and assigned to each its proper ce-  
‘ lestial abode; but that these souls (from  
‘ what reason does not appear) were sent  
‘ down to the earth, as into a sepulchre,  
‘ or prison, and that it is only by disen-  
‘ gaging itself from animal passions, and  
‘ rising above sensible objects, to the con-  
‘ templation of the world of intelligence,’  
(the *ideas* above mentioned) ‘ that the  
‘ soul of man can be prepared to return  
‘ to its destined habitation.’

He

He moreover held that ‘ the soul consists of three parts, the first the seat of intelligence, the second of the passions, and the third of appetite, and he assigned to each its proper place in the human body.

The Stoics thought very differently from each other concerning the duration of souls. ‘ Some of them were of opinion ‘ that they would all remain till the general ‘ conflagration; some that only those of ‘ the wise and good would continue so ‘ long; some thought that all souls, on being released from their bodies, would be ‘ immediately absorbed in the soul of the ‘ world; some that souls being of the nature of *fire*, would be extinguished at ‘ death; others that the soul was so confined in the gross body, that it could not ‘ find a passage out even at death, but ‘ must remain till it was intirely destroyed. ‘ Some of the Stoics thought that, in the ‘ universal restoration of nature, each individual would return to its former body, ‘ but others thought that then only similar ‘ souls would be placed in similar bodies.

Uncertainty cannot be more strongly indicated than in this diversity of opinion.

It does not appear whether Aristotle thought the human soul to be mortal or immortal; but the former is the more probable, from his opinion concerning the nature and origin of it. For he says ‘ it  
‘ is an intellectual power, externally transferred into the human body, from the  
‘ common source of rationality to human  
‘ beings.’ He does not say what he conceived this universal principle to be; but there is no proof that he supposed this principle continued with any individual after death.

If we may collect the sentiments of Aristotle from those of his followers, we may certainly conclude that he did not expect that men would in any sense, survive death. Dicæarchus, an Aristotelian, held that ‘ there was no such thing as *mind*,  
‘ or *soul*, in man or beast, that the principle  
‘ by which animals perceive is equally diffused through the body, and inseparable  
‘ from it.’ Alexander Aphrodisæus, another  
other

other follower of Aristotle, said that ‘ the  
‘ soul was not a distinct substance itself, but  
‘ the form of an organized body,’ meaning probably, that it was a property that was the result of organization. Theophrastus, an Aristotelian, at the close of life, expressed great regret at the shortness of it, and complained that ‘ nature  
‘ had given long life to stags and crows,  
‘ to whom it is of little value, and had  
‘ denied it to man, who, in a longer duration, might have been able to attain  
‘ the summit of science, but now, as soon  
‘ as he arrives within sight of it, he is taken away.’ His last advice to his disciples was that, ‘ since it is the lot of man  
‘ to die, as soon as he begins to live, they  
‘ should take more pains to enjoy life, than  
‘ to acquire posthumous fame.’ Indeed the natural inference from this doctrine is, as the Apostle expresses it, *Let us eat and drink, for to morrow we die.*

The great father of modern unbelievers among Mahometans and Christians, was Averroës, a Saracen, devoted to the philosophy

losophy of Aristotle, whose writings made  
 all the unbelievers in the age of Petrarch,  
 and that of Pope Leo X. He held : the  
 ‘ eternity of the world, and the existence  
 ‘ of one universal intellect, the source of  
 ‘ all human intelligence, into which every  
 ‘ separate intelligence will finally be re-  
 ‘ solved, and consequently he denied the  
 ‘ distinct existence, and proper immortality  
 ‘ of the human soul.’ I need not say how  
 irrational this notion, so long prevalent  
 with those who ridiculed the scriptures, is.  
 Modern unbelievers will smile at the ex-  
 treme absurdity of it, as much as any  
 Christians, and so they will at all the sys-  
 tems of their predecessors, the heathen  
 philosophers; though in a general way,  
 with a view to disparage the writers of  
 the scriptures, they, but with little  
 real knowledge of them, occasionally cry  
 them up.

I hardly need to mention any more of  
 these vague opinions, altogether destitute of  
 proof, or probability. But I shall observe  
 that Democritus said that ‘ men were first  
 ‘ produced

‘ produced from water and earth, and  
‘ that the soul, or the principle of animal  
‘ life and motion, is the result of a com-  
‘ bination of round and fiery particles, and  
‘ is mortal, and perishes with the body.’  
And Epicurus said, ‘ the soul is a subtle  
‘ corporeal substance, composed of the  
‘ finest atoms.’

The principles of sound reasoning and true philosophy, have sufficiently exploded all these crude systems, the best of which never produced such a persuasion concerning a future state as men could act upon, and suffer and die for; whereas the faith of Jews, and Christians, has unquestionably produced, and does still produce, these substantial fruits. And if the great end of *theory*, as it undoubtedly is, be *practice*, a doctrine which is both rational in itself, and supported by sufficient authority, must be infinitely preferable to such wild and incoherent systems as those of the antient philosophers, the knowledge of which, moreover, never extended beyond their own disciples, and which does  
not

not appear to have had any real influence even upon them.

But the great question before us at present is this; if Moses, and the other writers of the Old and New Testament, are to be classed with *philosophers* or *legislators*, how came they to frame a system so fundamentally different from any that other philosophers and legislators of the same age had conceived? And if they were *not*, but are to be considered as persons who had no advantage of learning or education, and therefore to be classed among the *vulgar*, and the vulgar of a rude and barbarous nation, as the Jews are generally considered, how came they to discover so much true knowledge, and adopt a system of religion, laws, and morals, which cannot be denied to be free from the crude conceptions, and gross absurdities, with which the systems of the boasted philosophers of the heathen world are chargeable? The only answer is, that what they wrote was from a source of wisdom *not their own*, or any that they could

could have borrowed from the neighbouring nations, but one much superior; and as they profess, *from God*. But what are we to think of those, who with the facts that I have recited before them, whether they will attend to them or not, are continually exclaiming against the religion of the Bible, without sparing any term of reproach, and praising the superior attainments, and philosophy, of the Greeks and Romans. Happily, however, there are facts enow before us, and abundantly ascertained, by which impartial persons may easily form a true judgment concerning both; and I hope there is yet in the world common sense, and candour too, sufficient to make a just comparison between them.

8. In a former discourse I shewed you to what horrid and abominable practices the popular religions among the heathens led. But these, it may be said, were peculiar to the *vulgar*, and that the *philosophers* would not fail to condemn those practices. This, however, was far from being the case. Many of the philosophers, no doubt, knew

knew better, and among themselves despised and ridiculed the popular superstitions, at least some of them; but they had not the just courage in the cause of truth and virtue, to run any risque in opposing so destructive a torrent. They themselves conformed to all the superstitious practices of those times, and recommended the same to others. Xenophon began his account of his beloved master Socrates, with saying, that ‘ he wondered how he came to  
‘ be charged with not believing in the gods  
‘ of his country, when he not only joined  
‘ in the public sacrifices, but frequently  
‘ sacrificed in private, and openly practised  
‘ divination, which was always deemed a  
‘ part of religion.’ Socrates himself said,  
‘ that it is the duty of every person, to  
‘ follow the customs of his country, in all  
‘ its religious rites.’ In such veneration did several of the philosophers hold the laws of their country, that they maintained there was no other rule of right and wrong. This doctrine was avowed by Democritus and Aristippus. I need not observe how  
abfurd

absurd this maxim was. Were the laws themselves framed by no rules of natural right or wrong? and how are we, on this principle, to make an estimate of the comparative excellence of different systems of law?

So far were the antient philosophers from entertaining the liberal sentiments which it is now the fashion to ascribe to them, that, in a period of three hundred years, during which the Christians were persecuted, as opposers of the vulgar superstition, there is no example of any philosopher pleading for the toleration of them. On the contrary, they were often the foremost to promote the persecution. The celebrated emperor Marcus Aurelius, who was himself an eminent philosopher, was one of the most unrelenting persecutors of Christians.

9. As several of the philosophers were aware that some of their tenets would have given offence to the vulgar, either from the nature of them, or from their being liable to be misunderstood, they had *doctrines*, which

which they communicated only to a few, and this under a strict injunction of secrecy. This practice was adopted by Pythagoras from the Egyptian priests. He moreover enjoined upon his pupils a silence of two, and sometimes of five, years. In this state of probation they were not permitted even to see their master, or to hear him, except from behind a curtain, and when they were admitted to his presence, and favoured with his secret doctrines, they bound themselves by an oath not to divulge them. Something of this nature was adopted by Plato. He said, ‘ it is a difficult thing to discover the nature of the creator of the universe, and being discovered, it is impossible, and would be impious, to expose the discovery to vulgar understandings. He therefore threw a veil of obscurity over his public instructions, which was only removed for the benefit of those who were thought worthy to be admitted to his more private and confidential lectures.’

But

But how much more noble was the conduct of Moses, and of our Saviour, who made no secret of any thing that they taught? How much dignity was there in the charge that Jesus gave to his apostles, to publish every thing that they knew of his doctrines, Mat. x. 27. *What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in the light, and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the house tops.*

10. In general, no doubt, the heathen philosophers had just ideas concerning moral virtues, and in their writings they express themselves with truth and energy on the subject; but in several respects their peculiar tenets misled them, and were unfavourable to a right disposition of mind, and a proper conduct in life. This could not but be the case with the Stoics, the most rigidly moral of all the antient sects. Their opinion that all souls are portions of the divinity, from which they inferred that they were sufficient for their own happiness, inspired them with a great degree of pride. For they said, ‘ it was  
‘ not

‘not in the power of the gods to make a good man unhappy.’ They maintained that pain was no evil, and that a wise man may be happy even in the midst of torture. They also held that he ought to be free from every emotion of affection or passion. Nature would never suffer any man to reduce this absurd system to practice; but the attempt to do it must have had an unfavourable influence on a man’s temper and conduct. Whether consistently with their principles, or not, many of the more eminent of the Stoics put an end to their own lives. This was done by Zeno himself, the founder of the sect, when, in a very advanced age, he was in much pain from breaking his finger.

II. It is common with unbelievers to decry both Christianity and Judaism, as species of *superstition*. But no misconceptions or abuse, of the Jewish or Christian religions, led to more absurd superstitions than the doctrines of the heathen philosophers, concerning the defiling nature of matter, their consequent contempt for the  
body

body, and their ideas of the purification of the soul by the mortification of it, It was, in fact, from the heathen philosophers that the Christians of the second and following centuries derived their opinions and practices on the subject. It was from them also that the monkish ideas of the superior merit of a *contemplative* to an *active* life, and of the value of seclusion from the world, were originally derived.

Pythagoras said that ‘contemplative  
‘wisdom cannot be completely attained  
‘without a total abstraction from the ordinary affairs of life, and a perfect tranquillity and freedom of mind.’ But the later Platonists, among whom we might expect the most advanced and improved state of philosophy, carried these ideas still farther. ‘They practised the most  
‘rigorous abstinence, as by this means  
‘they expected to purify themselves from  
‘moral defilement, and they passed whole  
‘days and nights in contemplation, and  
‘what they called devotion. Plotinus  
‘had such a contempt for the body, that  
‘he

‘ he never could be prevailed upon to  
‘ make use of any means to cure the dis-  
‘ eases to which his constitution was sub-  
‘ ject, or to alleviate his pain. His rigo-  
‘ rous abstinence, and determined neglect  
‘ of his health, at last brought him into a  
‘ state of disease and infirmity, which ren-  
‘ dered the latter part of his life extremely  
‘ painful.’ In Christians this would be  
laughed at, but in this deep philosopher, it  
may perhaps be admired.

To this superstition these philosophers  
joined the most extravagant enthusiasm.  
They supposed, that ‘ the soul of man,  
‘ prepared by previous discipline, might  
‘ rise to a capacity of holding immediate  
‘ intercourse with good demons, and even  
‘ to enjoy in ecstasy an intuitive vision of  
‘ God himself,’ a degree of perfection and  
felicity which some of the more eminent  
among them, such as Plotinus, Porphyry,  
Jamblicus, and Proclus, were supposed  
actually to have attained. Plotinus is said  
‘ to have ascended through all the Platonic  
‘ steps of contemplation, to the actual vi-  
‘ sion

‘ sion of the Supreme Being himself, and  
‘ to have been admitted to such inter-  
‘ course with him as no other philosopher  
‘ ever enjoyed.” Porphyry says that he  
‘ himself, in the sixty-eighth year of his  
‘ age, was in a sacred ecstasy, when he  
‘ saw the supreme intelligenece, the god,’  
he says, ‘ who is superior to all gods, with-  
‘ out an image.’

According to Jamblicus, ‘ the human  
‘ soul has an innate knowledge of ‘ God,  
‘ prior to all reasoning, in consequence of  
‘ its having originally derived its essence  
‘ from, and having subsisted in, the divine  
‘ nature ; that by the intervention of de-  
‘ mons, it enjoys communication with  
‘ the superior divinities, and with God  
‘ himself. Gods, demons, and heroes,’  
he says, ‘ appear to men under various  
‘ forms, in dreams, or waking visions, to  
‘ render them bodily or spiritual services,  
‘ and to enable them to predict future  
‘ events. But these communications with  
‘ the divine nature are not to be obtained  
‘ without the observance of certain sacred  
rites,

‘rites. The signs of divine communica-  
‘tions,’ he says, ‘are a temporary suspen-  
‘sion of the senses and faculties, the inter-  
‘ruption of the ordinary functions of  
‘life, and a capacity of speaking and do-  
‘ing wonders, so that in this state the per-  
‘son does not live an animal, or human,  
‘but a divine life.’

Jews and Christians are reproached for  
their credulity, for their faith in miracles,  
however well attested; but can they say  
that these Platonists were less credulous?  
‘With a view to destroy the credit which  
‘the Christian religion derived from mira-  
‘cles, or at least to advance their philoso-  
‘phy to a level with it, they pretended to  
‘a power of performing supernatural ope-  
‘rations, by the aid of invisible beings,  
‘and said that the miracles of Christ,’  
which they did not deny, ‘were wrought  
‘by the same magical, or as they termed  
‘them, *theurgic* powers, which they them-  
‘selves possessed. The emperor Julian,  
‘made great use of magical arts in exe-  
‘cuting his political purposes. While he  
‘reported

‘ was at Vienna, he reported that in the  
‘ middle of the night, he was visited by  
‘ a celestial form, which, speaking in heroic  
‘ verse, had promised him the possession  
‘ of the imperial dignity.

With these facts before us, and many more of the same kind might have been adduced, surely Christianity will no longer be exclusively taxed with superstition, enthusiasm, or credulity. But no countenance is given to these idle notions, or absurd practices, in the scriptures. Christ and the apostles were not monks, nor had they any monkish ideas. Their piety was perfectly rational, and their love of God evidenced by benevolence to man. And they inculcated no austerity, or mortification, besides that temperance, which is opposed to vicious excess, and contributes to the true enjoyment of life.

On the whole, we may surely say that, had modern unbelievers found in the scriptures any of the doctrines which I have shewn to have been professed by the philosophers of antiquity, had they found there

the doctrine of two coeternal principles; that of the emanation of all souls from the substance of the supreme Being, the absorption of them into it again, with their repeated emissions and retractions to all eternity; had they found there the doctrine of the formation of all things by the fortuitous concourse of atoms, that the air is filled with demons of different characters, directing the affairs of the world at their pleasure, and giving intimations of future events by omens and divination; had they found in the scriptures the doctrine of the pre-existence of all human souls, their lapse into gross bodies, where they are confined, and also contaminated by their connection with so debasing a companion, the purification of these embodied souls by austerities and mortification, their transmigration through the bodies of animals, by way of preparation for their ascent to the empyreal regions; had they there found the doctrine of one common principle of intelligence, or soul of the universe, in all men and animals, without giving

giving to each a permanent existence, had all or any of these doctrines been found in the scriptures, would they not have exclaimed against such crude notions, and wild conceptions, and have rejected the system without farther examination? It was, in fact, the finding no such opinions as these in the scriptures, that first led Christian philosophers, (after having adopted several of them from a heathen source, and having long endeavoured to hold them in conjunction with their christian principles) that led them to suspect their truth; and farther reflection on the subject led many to explode them altogether. Thus is the world indebted to Christianity for the detection of errors which were the disgrace of human reason, though patronized by the most eminent philosophers of the heathen world; yet modern unbelievers, though lying, with the rest of the world, under so great obligations to christianity, are now busily assailing it with every weapon of reason or ridicule. Its friends, however, are under no appre-

hensions about it. This very state of things was foreseen, and foretold, by its founder. Revealed religion is so far from shrinking from, that it invites, the strictest examination. Its friends being those of reason and truth, engage in its vindication only as supported by reason and truth, and as favourable to the best interests of mankind.

## DISCOURSE IX.

### *The evidence of the Mosaic and Christian Religions.*

#### P A R T I.

---

God, who, at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers, by the prophets, hath, in these last days, spoken unto us by his son.

HEB. i. 1--2.

IN the preceding Discourses I have endeavoured to prepare the way for the proper evidence of revealed religion, by explaining the nature, and shewing the importance, of the subject, and by exhibiting a comparative view of the heathen religions, and that of the Hebrews, which is that branch of revealed religion which is most objected to by unbelievers. The systems of the heathen religions, especially those

those of remote ages, coeval with the Mosaic institutions, you have seen to have been not only a confused mass of miserable superstition, arising from a total ignorance of the laws of nature, but to have consisted in rites shocking to humanity, good morals, and common decency, and that they were, in a great measure, the cause of the horrid depravity of manners which prevailed in the Gentile world. On the contrary, the tenets of the religion of the Hebrews, which has been so much decried by Voltaire and others, were, in the highest degree, rational, worthy of the Supreme Being, leading to the greatest purity of heart and life, and peculiarly calculated to counteract the effects of the absurd and mischievous religions of the neighbouring nations. Being, therefore, so much superior to, and reverse of, all the forms of religions, with which Moses or any of his countrymen, could have been acquainted, and even superior, as I have shewn, to the principles advanced by the most celebrated of the heathen philosophers,

phers, there is the greatest antecedent probability that it came from God, the fountain of wisdom; who thought proper to make choice of one nation, in which to preserve the true knowledge and worship of himself, amidst the general defection from it, and by that means to diffuse, in due time, the most salutary light to all his offspring of mankind. And it has already, in a great measure, effected this benevolent purpose, in the gradual unfolding of the plan, in the Christian revelation, which has a constant reference to that of Moses; so that they are to be considered as parts of the same scheme; the proper evidence of which I shall now proceed to lay before you. In order to do this as briefly as possible, I shall not consider the evidence of each separately, but jointly; especially as I have done the former, and more in detail, in another set of discourses, which are already before the Public.

I shall begin with observing that the only proper evidence of the interposition  
of

of God, as the author of nature, is an exhibition of something which he alone is capable of performing, that is, a proper *miracle*, or a controlling of the order of nature, which it must be allowed that no other than he who established it, and who constantly maintains it, can do. The medium of divine communications may be *men*, and where the instruction and reformation of men is the object, it is most naturally and properly so; but the power by which it is effected, must appear to be of God. Otherwise, there would be no reason to suppose that there was any thing superhuman in the scheme.

It has, indeed, been the opinion of some, that proper miracles may be wrought by beings superior to man, though inferior to the Supreme God, and even for purposes opposite to any that could be *his*, tending to mislead and injure mankind. But this is an opinion which I am persuaded will not be seriously maintained by any person at this day. It cannot, with any appearance of

of reason, be supposed, that the Supreme Being would put it in the power of any malevolent demon (supposing such beings to exist) thus to deceive his creatures, and without reserving to himself the power of undeceiving them. For if such beings as these were permitted to work real miracles, or perform such works as men were unable to distinguish from real miracles, it was all that himself could do; so that the mischief would be without remedy.

We must, therefore, take it for granted, and I doubt not, it will be universally allowed, that if there be a real departure from the order or laws of nature (which in the greater instances there is no danger of mistaking) it must be by the interposition of a power properly *divine*, and for a purpose worthy of divinity, of the great and good parent of the human race; for instance, to give them seasonable assistance in the discovery of interesting truth, and removing the causes of error, vice, and misery, which must otherwise have remained without remedy.

Miracles,

Miracles, then, being allowed to be the only, but a sufficient, evidence of divine interposition, it will be asked, what is the evidence of their having been wrought, to those who are not themselves witnesses of them? For it is not pretended that miracles are exhibited before all persons, but only occasionally. I answer, the testimony of those who *were* properly witnesses of them, but testimony so circumstanced, that the supposition of its being false would be more improbable on the whole than that of its being true; so that its being false shall, by a fair estimate, appear to be a greater miracle, or a greater deviation from the usual course of nature, than what is related as such. And certainly such cases may be supposed.

If, for instance, a great number of persons, universally allowed to have the use of their senses and understanding, seriously declare that they actually saw, or heard, any thing whatever, though *a priori* ever so improbable, and their *veracity* be  
not

not questioned, their senses must have been under a miraculous illusion, if the thing be not as they represent it. It will also be allowed, from the opinion generally entertained of human nature, that circumstances may be supposed, in which a great number of persons agreeing to tell a falsehood, when they could not have any motive to do it, would be deemed nothing less than miraculous.

It is readily acknowledged, that miracles not being events of daily or frequent occurrence, require more definite evidence than ordinary facts, and this in proportion to their antecedent improbability, arising from their want of analogy to events that are common. But there is no fact that is possible in itself, but the evidence *may* be such as to make it credible. The circumstances which tend to give credit to human testimony with respect to miracles, are the following. The witnesses must be in sufficient number. They must be in circumstances in which they cannot be deceived themselves, and they must have no appa-  
rent

rent motive to deceive others. In order to this, the miracles must be in sufficient number, and exhibited so long, as to afford opportunity for examining them. They must also be upon a large scale, or of such a nature as to exclude all idea of trick or imposition. They must be exhibited before persons who had no previous disposition to expect or to receive them. A sufficient degree of attention must be excited to them at the time, and a number of persons must be interested in ascertaining their reality. The history of them must be coeval with the events, and the belief of them must produce a lasting effect.

If all these circumstances should be found to concur in the miracles recorded in the scriptures, it must be allowed that they have all the credibility that facts so extraordinary, and of so great antiquity *can* have, and nothing more can be required in the case. The most sceptical of men cannot demand more satisfactory evidence. I shall therefore now proceed to consider

consider how far these circumstances apply to the miracles of which an account is contained in the Old and New Testament. For it is the truth of the system of religion proposed to us in these books that is to be proved by them.

I must, however, remind you, that though I would by no means crave your indulgence in being satisfied with a small degree of evidence, or less than such as I have described, the thing to be proved is far from being improbable *a priori*, so as to make such extraordinary evidence necessary. If men, who are the offspring of God, were involved in error, vice, and misery, from which it was not in their power to rescue themselves, it might even have been *expected* that their benevolent parent would provide some effectual means for their relief. And the scheme of revelation, which gives men the fullest information concerning the being, the perfections and the providence of God, concerning man's duty here, and a future state of retribution hereafter, the knowledge of  
which

which we have seen the wisest of men never attained of themselves, is excellently adapted to answer this end, and therefore it is not only desirable, but far from being improbable. On the contrary, I have shewn at large that the plan of revelation is, in a variety of respects, the most natural and the most effectual, and consequently the most eligible, mode of communicating religious instruction to men.

In this, however, I speak to the feelings of the virtuous, the worthy, and the thinking part of mankind, those whose characters and conduct are such as will naturally lead them to wish for, and rejoice in, the discovery of such momentous truths, and not the profligate and thoughtless, who are governed by mere appetite and passion, like the brutes, who, looking no farther than to mere animal enjoyments, never think of a God, of a providence, or a future state at all; and who, if it depended upon them, would not chuse that there should be any such thing.

In

It is well known that there are states of mind in which no attention will be given to any thing that is offensive to it. A philosopher of great eminence, having advanced an opinion concerning something that might be determined by a microscopical observation, refused to look through a microscope that was brought to him, with the object ready prepared, when he was told that the inspection would refute his hypothesis. And certainly vicious propensities lay a stronger bias on the mind than any speculative opinions whatever.

In minds exceedingly debased, there must be an almost invincible bias against the doctrines of revelation; and probably the evidence even of their own senses would not be sufficient to convince them. To such persons as these, I do not address myself at all, because it would be altogether in vain. Indeed I can hardly suppose that any motive, even that of curiosity, would bring any person of this character to hear me on the subject, and therefore

therefore I will not suppose any such to be present.

1. To those persons whose minds are not absolutely shut against conviction, I would observe, in the first place, that the miracles recorded in the scriptures, and on which the truth of the Mosaic and Christian institutions rests, are sufficiently *numerous*. Passing over all that preceded the age of Moses himself, the miracles which effected the emancipation of the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt, and their settlement in the land of Canaan, will certainly be allowed not to have been deficient with respect to *number*, whatever else be objected to them. They began with the miraculous appearance of fire, in a bush which was not consumed by it, the withering and restoring of Moses' arm, and the changing his rod into a serpent, and that serpent into a rod as at first. Then follow the ten great plagues of Egypt, beginning with the changing of the waters of the river into blood, and  
ending

ending with the death of all the first born of the Egyptians in one night, according to the prediction of Moses. We then proceed to the passage of the red sea, while the waters rose on each side to admit of it; the sweetning of the waters of Mara, the delivery of the ten commandments in an articulate voice from mount Sinai, the supplying of the whole nation with manna, and the conducting of them with the appearance of a pillar of cloud by day, and of fire by night during forty years, the drawing water from a rock, enough to supply the whole nation, at two different times, the death of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram by the opening of the earth at the word of Moses, the death of Nadab and Alihu, the two sons of Aaron, by fire from heaven, the passage of the river Jordan, by the dividing of its waters, the fall of the walls of Jericho, and some others of less consequence, all in the compass of one generation.

In the subsequent history of the Israelites, miracles were not so numerous, but

it is probable that no long period of it was intirely without them; till they were discontinued after the Babylonish captivity. But in this interval the Hebrew prophets foretold in the plainest language many future events which came to pass in their own times, or very near to them, and among these the fate of all the neighbouring nations, as well as of their own, to the latest period of time. Jeremiah foretold not only the Babylonish captivity, but the exact duration of it. In the time of Daniel we have the deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from the fiery furnace, of Daniel himself in the den of lions, and his foretelling the insanity (for such it must have been) of Nebuchadnezzar, and his restoration after seven years, as well as his prophecies concerning the rise and fall of the four great monarchies, which have been wonderfully verified, though part of them yet remain to be fulfilled.

After this we have an interval of about four hundred years, in which we find no pretensions to miracles, or prophecy. But during the public ministry of Jesus, miracles

cles were more numerous than they had ever been before. His divine mission was announced three times by articulate voices from heaven, he cured the diseases, however obstinate, of all who applied to him, and some when he was at a distance, and he raised at least three persons from a state of death. He twice fed several thousand persons with a small quantity of provisions, he also changed a large quantity of water into wine. He stilled a tempest at a word, he walked on the sea, and caused a fig-tree to wither by only speaking, he foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, and the temple, and the desolation of the country, to come to pass, in that generation; he rose from the dead after being publicly crucified, and visibly ascended to heaven.

Miracles not less considerable than these distinguished the ministry of the apostles, who succeeded Jesus. They not only expressed themselves in languages which they had never learned, but imparted this power to all the converts; they healed many sick persons, they even raised the dead,

and foretold several future events, which came to pass in their own time. If any person will say that these miracles (and many are omitted in this general view) are not sufficiently numerous for the purpose for which they were wrought, he would say that no *number* whatever would be sufficient, and therefore his objection would not be to the *number*, as such, but must be of some different kind, which will be considered under some of the following heads.

2. Many of the miracles recorded in the scriptures, were on so large a scale, or on other accounts of such a nature, that there could be no suspicion of trick or deception, with respect to them. If the *appearances* only existed (and with respect to them, the senses of men could not be deceived) the *cause* was indisputable. And such were almost all the miracles exhibited in Egypt, as the changing of all the water of such a river as the Nile, as large as any in this country, into blood, or any thing like blood, so that no use could be made  
of

of it; and this not momentarily, but for a considerable time, and yet an evil of this magnitude was removed at the prayer of Moses. Persons skilled in tricks of flight of hand, which was, no doubt, the case of the magicians of Egypt, might impose upon a company, even of intelligent and quick sighted persons, not used to them, and on Moses himself, with a small quantity of water, contained in a basin, or they might dexterously substitute a serpent in the place of a rod, or a rod in the place of a serpent; but the miracles exhibited by Moses, convinced even the magicians themselves, that what he did was by the *finger* of God, as they expressed themselves.

The plague of frogs, that of the lice, (as our translation renders the word,) of the murrain among the cattle, of the boils, of the hail, of the locusts, and of the darkness, might each of them separately, have been produced by natural causes. But that they should all be announced before hand, that none of them should affect the district occupied by the Israelites, which adjoined to  
the

the rest of Egypt, and that they should all be removed at the prayer of Moses, are undeniable evidences that the hand of God was in them. Still more was this evident in the death of the first-born, and of the first-born only, of man and of beast, through all the country, while not one of the Israelites died. By this display of divine power, Pharaoh and all the Egyptians were so terrified and subdued, that, unwilling as they before had been, to part with such useful servants, they *were* now desirous of getting rid of them, at any rate.

Upon a greater scale still, was the passage of the whole nation of Israelites, though not fewer than two millions of people, marching at their leisure, with all their cattle and baggage, through an arm of the red sea, while the water rose on each side of them, and all the Egyptians who had ventured to follow them were drowned. There could be no imposition on the senses in such a scene as this, or in the similar miracle of the passage of the river Jordan, in the same manner. The same may be said of other  
miraculous

miraculous appearances in the time of Moses, especially that of the delivery of the ten commandments in an articulate voice, heard by all the Israelites, then, as I observed, more than two millions of people, from mount Sinai, in a river, (for it could not be less) issuing from a rock, at the word of Moses; for the blow of his staff could not have had any such effect, and the descent of the manna every morning, with the remarkable and constant exception of one particular day in the seven, on which no manna fell, for the space of forty years, and the pillar of a cloud by day and of fire by night, which also attended them the same time, and directed all their marches. He must have been a bold impostor, indeed, who should have attempted any thing of this kind, and not so reluctant and so timid a leader as Moses evidently was.

Among the miracles which were on so large a scale as to exclude all idea of deception, I may mention the falling down of the walls of Jericho, on the ark being  
carried

carried round the place seven times, the falling down of the idol Dagon, in the presence of the ark, the calamities which betel the cities of the Philistines, to which it was sent, and the circumstances of its conveyance back into the land of Canaan, viz. in a carriage drawn by cows whose calves were kept at home.

Of the miracles that come under this class, was the strength imparted to Sampson, by which he was able to take down the gates of a city, and carry them to the top of a hill, and after losing his strength, his recovering it again, so as to pull down the building in which were assembled all the lords of the Philistines, when they were all killed. Such also was the burning of the sacrifice of Elijah, on mount Carmel, while the priests of Baal attempted the same in vain, he being alone; and they four hundred men, favoured by an idolatrous king, who was himself present, and the people in general also favouring them. I might add, under this head, several other miracles recorded in the Old Testament,

and

and must not omit to mention in this view also, the case of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were preserved unhurt in the fiery furnace at Babylon, and also the delivery of Daniel from the lions, in the same city.

The miracles recorded in the New Testament are not, in general, on so large a scale as many of those recited in the Old, but they are sufficiently so to be out of the reach of any charge of trick and imposition. Such were the cures performed by Jesus, of such diseases as, though sometimes curable by medical treatment, always require a long time; whereas his cures were always instantaneous, and yet complete. Such were his cures of blindness, especially of the man who was born blind, of fevers, which are never cured but by coming to a certain crisis, of leprosy, of the dropy; and especially of insanity, called the casting out of demons, the supposed cause of that disorder. Of this class, more especially, was his raising to life, the daughter of Jairus, at Capernaum, the widow's son at Nain,

Nain, and of Lazarus at Bethany. Of miracles of this class, were his feeding first five thousand, and afterwards four thousand persons, with a few loaves and fishes, his stilling a tempest, his walking on the sea, and a stormy sea, and lastly his resurrection and ascension.

In the history of the apostles, the miracles of this class are those called *the gift of tongues*, by which thousands of persons were enabled to express themselves in languages which they had not learned, the cure of the beggar who was known to have been lame from his birth, at the gate of the temple, the deliverance of Peter and John, and afterwards of Peter only, out of prison, when every precaution had been taken to secure them, and also the cure of many diseases by Peter and others, similar to the cures performed by Jesus. Several other miracles might be mentioned under this head, but these are abundantly sufficient for the purpose, that is, they were appearances with respect to which there could not have  
been

been any deception. Persons who were present, could never have been under any mistake with respect to the *facts*, and the facts were of such a nature, that they must necessarily have been miraculous, how ignorant soever we may be of the powers, or laws, of nature in other respects.

3. Many of the miracles recorded in the scriptures, and almost all those that are mentioned under the preceding head, were performed in the presence of a great number of persons. At the miracles performed by Moses, all the inhabitants of Egypt, and the whole nation of Israelites, were present. All the latter must have seen every thing that passed in the wilderness. The whole nation passed through the river Jordan, and saw the falling of the walls of Jericho. The whole nation of the Philistines could not but know of the triumph of the ark of God over their idol Dagon, and the manner in which it was conveyed back to the land of Canaan. Ahab and his court, and no doubt thousands of the  
common

common people, were present at Elijah's sacrifice. Nebuchadnezzar, and all the people of Babylon, must have known of the deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and so must Darius, and all people in his time, the deliverance of Daniel from the lions.

With respect to the miracles of Jesus, it is evident from the nature of them, and from his manner of life, that they could not but have been known to the whole nation of the Jews. Peter, speaking of them to a promiscuous multitude who were assembled in Jerusalem on the report of the wonderful gift of tongues, expressed himself in the following remarkable manner, Acts ii. 22, *Ye men of Israel, hear my words, Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him, in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know.* Again, addressing himself to Cornelius, a Roman centurion, and his friends, he says, concerning Jesus, and the gospel, Acts, x. 36. *The word which God sent unto the children of Israel,*  
*that*

*that word ye know, which was published throughout all Judea. He evidently did not think it necessary to produce witnesses of particular facts. He took it for granted that they were known to every body, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the holy spirit, and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him; and we are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem.*

Also, when Paul was addressing king Agrippa, in the presence of Festus, and the court, he says, Acts xxvi. 20, *None of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.* To the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus, all the country, but for the best reasons, were not witnesses. But certainly five hundred who saw him at one time, were abundantly sufficient to ascertain the fact, as far as any number could do it.

The miracle of the gift of tongues, conferred on the apostles, and all the primitive Christians, could not but be known

known to all the country, and in every place in which it was conferred. The cure of the lame beggar at the gate of the temple, was, from the circumstances of it, as public as any thing of the kind could well be, and the deliverance of Peter and John from prison, when the court and all the people knew of their commitment, and were in expectation of their being produced, must have engaged universal attention. Paul was a person so well known to the chief priests, and so active in the persecution of the Christians, that the circumstances of his conversion were, no doubt, the subject of much conversation, and the miracles that he performed in striking Elymas with blindness in the presence of the governor of Cyprus, the cure of the lame man at Lystra, for which the people would have sacrificed to him as to a god, his cure of the insane woman at Thessalonica, and of the demoniacs at Ephesus, were of the most conspicuous nature.

4. The miracles recorded in the scriptures, especially the great ones which attended the promulgation of the law of Moses, and of Christianity, were all performed in the presence of enemies, at least of persons not at all predisposed to believe them, or to be convinced by them. It appears that Moses himself, who had resided forty years in Arabia, and was married, and had settled there, was exceedingly averse to undertake any thing in favour of his countrymen, and that they, seeing no remedy, had acquiesced in their state of servitude; but that his reluctance was overcome by miracles, and the positive command of God.

In his expostulation with God on the subject, he expressed the unwillingness of his countrymen to believe his mission. On the sight of the miracles which he was impowered to work in their presence, they were satisfied with respect to it, but their deliverance not being effected immediately, and their servitude being rendered more galling, they conceived great indignation

dignation against Moses and Aaron, for attempting it. We read Exod. v. 20. *And they met Moses and Aaron, who stood in the way, as they came forth from Pharoah, and they said unto them, the Lord look upon you, and judge, because you have made our savour to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharoah, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword into their hands to slay us.* Moses himself at this time repented of his undertaking. For we read, v. 22. *And Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, wherefore hast thou so evil intreated this people? Why is it that thou hast sent me, for since I came to Pharoah to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people, neither hast thou delivered thy people at all.* On this Moses received farther encouragement, but when he spake to his countrymen again, chap. ix. *they hearkened not unto him, for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage.*

When, in consequence of a series of miracles, of the most astonishing kind, the deliverance of the Israelites was actually effected, and they had marched out of the country, on perceiving that they  
were

were pursued, they were exceedingly alarmed, and said unto Moses, *Exod. xiv. 11. Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? Wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt? saying, Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians. For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.* It was almost with as much reluctance that the Israelites were induced to leave Egypt as the Egyptians expressed to let them go. On every adverse event, or hardship, we find them making the same complaints, and regretting that they had left Egypt.

Thus, when they wanted water, we read, *Exod. xvii. 3. The people murmured against Moses, and said, wherefore is it that thou hast brought us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children, and our cattle with thirst. And Moses cried unto the Lord saying, what shall I do unto this people, they be almost ready to stone me.* Finding no flesh meat in the wilderness, they again repented that they

Z

had

had left Egypt, Num. xi. 4. *They wept saying, Who shall give us flesh to eat. We remember the fish that we did eat freely in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now is our soul dried away. There is nothing at all but this manna before our eyes.*

On the unfavourable report of the spies, who had been sent to explore the land of Canaan, we read, Num. xiv. 2. *All the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt, or would God that we had died in the wilderness; and wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey. Were it not better for us to return to Egypt. Again, when they wanted water, after passing forty years in the wilderness, and been maintained by miracle all that time, we read, chap. xx. 2. they gathered themselves together against Moses, and against Aaron, and the people chode with Moses, and the people said, Would God we had died when*  
our

*our brethren died before the Lord, and why have ye brought up the congregation of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there ; and wherefore have ye made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of seed, or of figs, or vines, or pomegranates, neither is there any water to drink. Lastly, When Arad the Canaanite fell upon them, and took some prisoners, we read, Numb. xxi. 4. the souls of the people were much discouraged, because of the way, and the people spake against God and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt, to die in the wilderness; for there is no bread, neither is there any water, and our soul loatheth this light bread.*

As to the religion which Moses prescribed to this people, there is the most abundant and indisputable evidence of their having been very far indeed from having had any predilection for it. On the contrary, they from the first discovered a dislike for it, and took every opportunity of deserting it, and revolting to the more alluring

luring rites of the neighbouring nations; and such as, no doubt, they had been accustomed to, and been fond of, in Egypt. But as this is a subject of the greatest importance, I shall defer enlarging upon it to the next opportunity.

## DISCOURSE X.

### *The evidence of the Mosaic and Christian Religions.*

#### PART II.

---

God, who, at fundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers, by the prophets, hath, in these last days, spoken unto us by his son.

HEB. i. 1--2.

IN my last Discourse, I observed that the only proper evidence of divine revelation, is the exhibition of something to which divine power alone is equal, or proper *miracles*, and that these, not being analogous to common events, are, on that account, improbable, *a priori*, and therefore require more definite evidence, though there is nothing that is possible in itself, but may be proved to have taken place by human

human testimony. And I farther observed, that all that the most sceptical persons could require in the case, were the following circumstances, viz. that the miracles must be in sufficient number, and also exhibited so long, as to afford sufficient opportunity to consider and examine them. They must be on so large a scale, or otherwise of such a nature, as to exclude all suspicion of trick and imposition; they must be exhibited before persons who had no previous disposition to expect or believe them; a great degree of attention must be excited to them at the time, and a sufficient number of persons must be interested to ascertain their reality, while the events were recent; the history of them must be coeval with the events, and the belief of them must have produced a lasting effect.

Three of the first mentioned of these circumstances I have already shewn are found in the miracles recorded in the scriptures, and with respect to the next, I have shewn that the Hebrew nation was sufficiently

sufficiently indisposed to believe the divine mission of Moses in general, and I shall proceed to show that they were more particularly indisposed to receive the *religion* which he presented to them, and which it was the great object of all the miracles to establish. So far, I have observed, were they from being predisposed to receive and embrace it, that from the very first they discovered a dislike of it, and took every opportunity of deserting it, and revolting to the more alluring rites of the neighbouring nations, and this disposition continued more than a thousand years.

Upon Moses's staying in the mount longer than the people expected, and thinking they should hear no more of him (for he had been absent forty days, and where he could not find any sustenance) we read Ex. xxxii. 1. *the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up make us gods that shall go before us. For as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.* After this, they made a golden calf, built  
an

an altar before it, offered burnt offerings, and peace offerings, when the *people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play*, no doubt in the licentious manner in which the religious festivals of the Egyptians were conducted.

A severe judgment, and the return of Moses, brought them back to the new religion. But after they had passed forty years in the wilderness, in which they had no opportunity of shewing their disposition, on coming into the neighbourhood of the Moabites and Medianites, we read Numb. xxv. 1. *the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab, and they called the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods, and Israel joined himself unto Baal Peor*. Another heavy judgment recovered them from this defection, but it is not probable that any reasoning, or expostulation, would have done it.

The miraculous passage of the river Jordan, the falling down of the walls of Jericho, and their conquering the warlike inhabitants of Canaan, devoted to the worship

ship of idols, satisfied the Israelites that their God was superior to the gods of that country, and therefore we read Josh. xxiv. 31. *that Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who out-lived Joshua, who had known all the works of the Lord, that he had done for Israel.* But the very next generation shewed a different disposition. For we read Jud. ii. 10. *when that generation was gathered to their fathers, there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel; and the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim, and they forsook the Lord god of their fathers, who brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people who were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger, and they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.*

The history of this people, till the time of Samuel, is nothing but a repetition of revolts, and punishments for them, by the invasion and oppression of some neighbouring

ing nation. *When they repented, as we read Jud. ii. 16. the Lord raised up judges, who delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them, and yet they would not hearken unto their judges; but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them. They turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the Lord; but they did not so. And when the Lord raised them up judges, then was the Lord with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies, all the days of the judge. And it came to pass when that judge was dead, that they returned and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods, to serve them, and to bow down unto them. They ceased not from their own doings, and from their stubborn way. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he said, Because this people has transgressed my covenant, which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice, I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them, of the nations which Joshua left when he died, that through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the Lord, to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not.*

For

For these revolts they were reduced into servitude, first by Cushman-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia, from whose power they were rescued by Othniel, then by the king of Moab, from whom they were delivered by Ehud; then by the Philistines, when they were delivered by Shamgar. From Jabin king of Canaan, they were delivered by Deborah and Barak; from the Midianites by Gideon, from the Ammonites by Jephtha, from the Philistines a second time, in part by Samson, but more completely by Saul and David, under whom the worship of Jehovah was rendered triumphant; and in that state it continued till the latter end of the reign of Solomon, when he had the weakness not only to indulge his wives, taken from the neighbouring nations, in the worship of the gods of their respective countries, but to join them in it.

Notwithstanding the very flourishing state of the affairs of the Israelites in the reigns of David and Solomon, which was always in those days, and long afterwards, ascribed

ascribed to the power of the gods that they worshipped, the ten tribes which revolted from the house of David, revolted also from the religion of Moses, at first indeed by only setting up images at Dan and Bethel, in honour of the true God, but afterwards, and especially in the reign of Ahab, worshipping Baal, and all the host of heaven. And though by the judgment of a three years drought, in which they found that the worship of Baal could give them no relief, and the seasonable miracle of Elijah at mount Carmel, they were recovered, at least for some time, from this species of idolatry, they continued to worship the calves at Dan and Bethel, till their captivity by the Assyrians; when they became so mixed and incorporated with other nations, as not to be distinguished; and whether they be now discovered or not, they are without any badge of their antient religion, to which it is evident they never discovered any attachment.

The kingdom of Judah having the temple within its limits, and other advantages, adhered better to the worship of the true God, but with several remarkable departures from it, as in the reign of Rehoboam the son of Solomon, who as we read, 2Chron. xii. 1. *forsook the law of the Lord, and all Israel with him*; in that of Jehoram, the son of Jehosaphat, of Ahab, of Joash, after the death of the pious high-priest Jehoiada, of Ahaz, of Manasseh, who made use of the temple itself, for the worship of other gods; and of Amon, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah, whose reign was put an end to by Nebuchadnezzar taking Jerusalem, destroying the temple, and carrying the people into captivity to Babylon.

If this history, of which I have only given a faint outline, do not supply sufficient and redundant evidence of the dislike which the Israelites had to the institutions of Moses, and consequently of the reluctance with which they must have received, and conformed to them, nothing  
can

can be proved concerning the disposition and turn of thinking of any people whatever. It cannot, therefore, be denied, that all the miracles wrought to establish this religion, and confirm them in it, may be considered as exhibited before enemies, persons predisposed not to receive, but to cavil at, and reject it. This is the more remarkable, as there is no other instance in all history, of any nation voluntarily abandoning the religion of their ancestors till the promulgation of Christianity, before which they all gradually disappeared, like clouds before the sun.

The Babylonish captivity having been foretold, together with its exact duration, by the Hebrew prophets, and the overthrow of Babylon, famous for its addictions to idol worship, effectually cured those of the Jews who returned to their own country, and no doubt many others, of any disposition to the worship of foreign gods, but they were not by this means the more, but in fact, the less disposed to receive the miracles of Jesus.

Indeed

Indeed it is evident that they had not been previously disposed to believe any miracles. For before the appearance of Jesus, there had been no pretensions to a power of working miracles in the country, a circumstance which by no means agrees with the charge commonly advanced against the Jews as a credulous people. It is well known, however, that when Jesus appeared, the nation in general, then in a state of subjection to the Romans, a situation which they ill brooked, were in anxious expectation of the appearance of the Messiah announced by their prophets, and who they took for granted, was immediately to assume the character of a temporal prince, rescue them from their subjection to the Romans, and give them the dominion of the whole world; and certainly to this character that of Jesus bore no resemblance.

Besides, Jesus's free censure of the priests, and leading men in the nation, soon made them his most bitter enemies. They, seeing, that whatever he was, *they* had

had nothing to expect from *him*, spared no pains to destroy him, and did not rest till they had actually compassed his death. All the miracles of Jesus, therefore, were exhibited before enemies. Even the most virtuous and best disposed of the Jews were as much attached to the idea of a temporal prince, for their Messiah, as any of their countrymen, so that even this part of the nation must have been exceedingly indisposed to receive Jesus in that character; and when they did it, it was with the idea that, though he did not assume it *then*, he would at some future time. Even after his resurrection, the apostles asked him whether he would *at that time restore the kingdom to Israel*, Acts i. 6. and their minds were not fully enlightened on this subject till after the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

The resurrection of Jesus, though the most pleasing event to all his disciples, was a thing of which, it is evident, they had no expectation after his death, so that it was not without the greatest difficulty,  
and

and the most undeniable evidence, that of their own senses, that they were brought to believe it. The manner in which the apostle Thomas expressed his incredulity on the subject, is very remarkable. He was not present at the first appearance of Jesus, and when the others, as we read, John xx. 25, said unto him, *We have seen the Lord*, he said unto them, *Except I see in his hands the prints of his nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.* In this particular, however, Jesus, the next time that he appeared to his disciples, gave him the satisfaction that he demanded. For he said to Thomas, *Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands, and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless, but believing.* No doubt all the rest of the apostles were at first, in the same state of mind with respect to this event. In this case, therefore, even the disciples of Christ, may be considered as prejudiced against the reception of this great miracle, and are by no means to be chargeable with credulity.

The apostles, and all the first preachers of christianity, were in the same situation with respect to the great body of the Jews, that Jesus had been in before them; and nothing could be more violent than the opposition they actually met with. One of the most remarkable conversions, was that of Paul, and in the history of it, we see, in the strongest light, the extreme prejudice which even the better kind of Jews, entertained against christianity. Nothing less than the appearance of Jesus himself, was able to effect his conversion. Of the miraculous circumstances attending this conversion, his chosen companions, men who, no doubt, were actuated with as much zeal as himself, against the new religion, and who probably continued enemies to it, were witnesses, and to them he afterwards appealed for what they saw and heard, viz. a light surpassing that of the sun at noon-day; and the sound of a voice, though they did not distinguish the words, that were directed to him.

As to the Gentiles, nothing can be imagined more unpromising than the mission of the apostles to them. The pride of the Jews, and the contempt with which they treated other nations, had given rise, as was natural, to an equal degree of hatred and contempt on their side; so that nothing coming from a *Jew*, was at all likely to be favourably attended to by them. The heathens in general, and the Greeks and Romans in particular, were most strongly attached to the rites of their religions, and thought the observance of them necessary to the prosperity of their several states. The gravest magistrates dreaded the discontinuance of them, and the profligate and licentious among the heathens, gave a loose, as I have shewn, under the sanction of religion, to their favourite vicious propensities, in the greatest latitude. The learned and philosophical among the heathens, looked with the greatest contempt on the plainness and want of eloquence, in the apostles, and other preachers of christianity. In this state of things, then, was it to be

expected that the heathen world in general, would be at all credulous, with respect to miracles wrought by such men. On the contrary, the preachers of christianity, had nothing to expect but the extreme of incredulity. In fact, great numbers could not be brought to give the least attention to any thing that was reported concerning them, or to look into any of their books. Dr. Lardner observes, that it is pretty evident that even Pliny, who gave the emperor Trajan an account of his proceedings against the Christians, and his examination of them, when they were brought before his tribunal, (and he was a man of letters) had not read any of the books of the New-Testament, or any other writings of Christians, which were unquestionably extant. If, therefore, the new religion did make its way, it must have been against every possible disadvantage, and history shews that this was the case.

5. In order to secure credit to accounts of miracles, there must be both *opportunity*, and *motive*, for examining into the truth of  
of

of the facts. Now, the miracles being numerous, a circumstance on which I have already enlarged, gives opportunity for examination; so also does that of their continuance some space of time, and this was the case with respect to many, I may say almost all the miracles, which have been already mentioned, particularly the several plagues of Egypt, none of which were momentary appearances, but all were of some days continuance. Such, also, was the passage through the red sea, and the river Jordan, one of which took up a whole night, and the other a whole day. The same was the case with respect to the delivery of the ten commandments from mount Sinai, but more especially the miracle of the manna, and the pillar of cloud and fire, which continued forty years.

The cures performed by Jesus, though instantaneous, produced lasting effects, especially his raising of the dead, as of Lazarus, which, as we read, excited much curiosity to see him afterwards. Our Saviour's own appearance after his resurrection, was not  
like

like that of an apparition in the night, but always in the day time, and frequently repeated. His first appearance was when his disciples had no expectation of any such thing, so that they could not have been deceived by their imaginations, and afterwards by particular appointment, so that they had time to recollect themselves, and to procure any kind of satisfaction that they wanted; and this continued the space of forty days before his ascension, which appears to have been leisurely, so that they who were present stood gazing some time, while they saw him go above the clouds. He did not leave them in a private manner, and go they knew not whither.

But the best opportunity for examining the truth of any facts, is when some persons assert, and others deny them, and when they are at the same time much interested in the event of the inquiry, as by having what is most dear to them depending upon it. And this was remarkably the case with respect to the resurrection of Jesus. With respect to his miracles, and also

also those of the apostles, there does not appear to have been any dispute about them, by those who were then in the country. They only ascribed them to a false cause. But Jesus not appearing to all persons after his resurrection, and especially not to his enemies, but only to his friends, though in numbers abundantly sufficient for the purpose, his enemies denied *that* fact.

The fact, however, was of so very important a nature, that we cannot doubt but that it must have been thoroughly investigated, much more so than any other fact in all history, because infinitely more depended upon it, than upon any other fact whatever. For in a very short time such was the rage of the rulers of the Jews against the rising sect, that not only were the peace, and the property, but the lives of the Christians at stake, and these they would not give up for an idle tale. At the same time their persecutors, who were the men in power, stimulated by hatred and opposition, would leave nothing untried to refute the story. This state of things began immediately  
after

after the resurrection of Jesus, and continued about three hundred years, during all which time the Christians, though exposed to grievous persecution, kept increasing in number, till at the time that Constantine was advanced to the empire, it was not only safe, but advantageous to him to declare himself a Christian. We may therefore be satisfied, that the great fact of the resurrection of Jesus, on which the truth of christianity more particularly depends, underwent a more thorough investigation than any other fact in history.

This rigorous scrutiny began while the event was recent, and when there was, accordingly, the best opportunity of examining into its truth or falsehood. Paul, who says that Jesus at one time appeared to more than five hundred persons, says that the greater part of them were then living, and of course liable to be interrogated on the subject. Now, had Jesus appeared as publicly after his crucifixion as he did before, and of course the whole Jewish nation had become Christians, we  
should

should now have been without this most satisfactory argument for the truth of the fact.

It would, in this case, have been said, that the Jews, always a credulous nation; (though this has appeared to have been the reverse of the truth) had for some reason or other, which it is now impossible to ascertain, changed their religion, or rather made some addition to what they professed before, and that as no person objected to it at the time, there is no evidence now before us that the facts, or reasons, on which it was founded, were properly scrutinized; and that it is impossible to do it at this distance. And thus christianity might have spread no farther than Judaism.

6. To ensure the credibility of miracles, it must appear that the accounts of of them were written while the facts were recent, so that an appeal might be made to living witnesses, and this was never in antient times questioned with respect to the principal books of the Old or the New Testament.

Testament. Besides, the internal evidence of the books ascribed to Moses, having been written by him, or by some person under his direction, which to every impartial reader of them, must appear stronger than the evidence of any other books having been written by any other persons, whose names they bear, the fact was never doubted by the Hebrew nation, the only proper witnesses in the case, from the earliest times to the present; and nothing stronger than this can be said in favour of the authenticity of any writings whatever.

This argument is peculiarly strong with respect to the writings of Moses, on account of the reluctance with which those writings, and the whole history of that nation, shows, that they received his instructions. If those of the Israelites who were addicted to the religious rites of the neighbouring nations, and who were frequently the majority of the people, could have shewn that the books ascribed to Moses, were not written by him, or  
by

by his authority, would they not have done it, and thereby have had the best reason for continuing in the religion they preferred? And what motive could any man have to forge books which would be sure to give the greatest offence, and could not fail to be rejected with contempt and indignation?

The account of the death of Moses in the last chapter of the book of Deuteronomy, could not have been written by himself. But what was more natural, than for some person of eminence, acquainted with the fact, perhaps Joshua, or the high priest at the time, adding this account to the writings of Moses, and its being afterwards annexed to them. Also, notes by way of explanation of certain passages, were, no doubt, first inserted in the margin, as has been the case with many antient books, and afterwards added by transcribers, in the text. But such circumstances as these are never thought to affect the genuineness of any antient writings. Judicious criticism easily distinguishes the casual additions, from the original text.

The internal evidence of the authenticity of the writings of Moses is peculiarly strong. No other than a person actually present at the transactions could have related them in the manner in which we find his narratives written, with so many particulars of persons, times, and places, and with so natural an account of the impression that was made on the minds of men by the events that he relates\*.

\* That additions may be made to books, and even such as the writers disapprove of, we have a remarkable instance of in the first part of Mr. Paine's *Age of Reason*. In the second part just published in this city, he says, p. 84. "The former part of the *Age of Reason* has not been published two years, and there is already an expression in it that is not mine. The expression is, *The book of Luke was carried by a majority of one vote only*. It may be true, but it is not I that have said it. Some person, who might know of that circumstance, has added it in a note at the bottom of the page of some of the editions, printed either in England or in America, and the printers, after that have erected it into the body of the work, and made me the author of it. If this has happened within such a short space of time, notwithstanding the aid of printing, which prevents the alteration of copies individually, what may not have happened in a much greater length of time, where there was no printing." He adds, "and when any man who would write, could make a written copy, and call it an original by Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John." But though this might easily happen with respect to slight circumstances, according with the rest of  
a book

It should also be considered, that books were not forged till men were practised in the art of writing, and many books had been written, so that considerable advances had been made in the art of composition and of criticism. We may therefore conclude with certainty, that the books ascribed to Moses, which are unquestionably of as great antiquity as any in the world, except perhaps the book of Job, and a very few others mentioned by Moses, are no forgeries. Otherwise, the art of forging historical writings, the most difficult of all others, was brought to the greatest perfection all at once, a supposition that cannot be admitted. Indeed, there does not appear to have been the

a book, well known to exist, the fabrication of *whole books*, which were not known to exist at all, and imposing them on the world, when the belief of their contents drew after it the sacrifice of every thing dear to a man in life, and often of life itself, was not so easy.

The insertion Mr. Paine complains of, being a recent thing, and all the editions of his book not very numerous, may be traced to its author, and it behoves him, or his friends, to do it; but this cannot be done with respect to books written two or three thousand years ago.

least

least fuspicion of the forgery of any books till after the time in which all those of the Old Testament are well known to have been extant. There cannot, therefore, be any reasonable doubt but that the books ascribed not only to Moses, but those to the prophets Ifaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, are genuine, except so far as they may have suffered by transcribers.

The objection of Porphyry to the book of Daniel, that it was written after the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (for which it does not appear that he had any other evidence than the exact fulfilment of some part of his prophecies in the events) is certainly not to be regarded. It can derive no more weight from the time in which he wrote, than if it had been first advanced at this day, becaùse it is only an argument from what appears on the face of the book itself, which is before us, as it was before him. And at that time the evidence of the whole Jewish nation, which had always recieved that book, and in fact that of the Samaritans too, who,

as far as appears, never objected to it, was against him.

It is moreover self evident, and indeed never was denied, that the books of the Old Testament were written by different persons, and at different times. That any number of them should have been written by the same person, or a combination of persons, and imposed upon a whole nation as written in former times, and by different persons in those times (especially considering the many ungrateful truths contained in these books) is an hypothesis which no person will say is even possible. Consequently, the references to particular books from others, may safely be admitted as an evidence of their genuineness, which is the principal argument for the age, and the genuineness, of all other antient writings. Now it appears from the books of Kings and Chronicles, that Isaiah lived in the time of Hezekiah, and from the same that Jeremiah lived at the time of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, which is abundantly evident from his own writings.

ings. The narrative part of the book of Jeremiah is remarkably circumstantial, so as to render its internal evidence unquestionable. I do not even think it possible for any person of the least degree of judgment in these matters, to entertain a suspicion of its being a forgery of a later time. Jeremiah is also mentioned in the book of Daniel. Such too is the internal evidence for the genuineness of the book of Ezekiel who makes mention of Daniel, of that of Daniel too, and of all the other prophetic books, in which there is any mention of or allusion to historical facts.

A circumstance which adds to the authenticity of the writings of Moses, is, that the solemn customs and religious rites of the Jews, such as their public festivals, and especially the observance of the passover, were coeval with them, so that they, as it were, vouch for each other. The passover was a solemn custom, expressly instituted, in commemoration of the deliverance of the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt, and began to be observed at  
the

the very time; so that accompanied as it is with the written account of it, it is the most authentic of all records. No other event in history, is so fully authenticated as this, except that of the death of Christ, by a similar rite, viz. that of the Lord's Supper.

The early existence of the sect of the Samaritans affords a proof that the books of Moses have not undergone any material alteration from before the time of the Babylonish captivity. If Ezra, who collected the books after that event, had made any material alteration in them, the Samaritans, who were then extremely hostile to him, and to all who resided and worshipped at Jerusalem, would, no doubt, have exposed it. But in our Saviour's time, they had the same respect for the books of Moses, that the Jews themselves ever had; and this they have at this very day. It is probable too, that they had the same respect for the writings of the prophets, though they did not make use of them in their religious worship, and therefore had

no copies of them; for they appear (John iv. 25.) to have expected a Messiah, of whom there is no account, but in the writings of the prophets.

There is similar evidence, internal and external, that the principal books of the New Testament, by which I mean the historical ones, and also that the epistles of Paul, were written while the events were recent, and that they were received as such, by those who were most interested in their contents. This was never questioned by any unbeliever, within several hundred years of the time of their publication. It was admitted by Celsus, and the emperor Julian, both of whom wrote against christianity, and did not even question the truth of the greater part of the miracles recorded in them. And yet Mr. Paine, ignorant of this, asserts in the second part of his *Age of Reason*, p. 83. that ‘ there is not the least shadow  
‘ of evidence, who the persons were that  
‘ wrote the books ascribed to Matthew,  
‘ Mark, Luke or John, that none of the  
‘ books of the New Testament, were writ-  
ten

‘ ten by the men called apostles, and that  
‘ there was no such book as the *New*  
‘ *Testament*, till more than three hundred  
‘ years after the time that Christ is said to  
‘ have lived,’ that is about the time of  
Constantine. On this supposition how stupendous a miracle, must have been the overthrow of heathenism, and the general reception of Christianity, in the Roman empire at that period. This would have been far more extraordinary, than all the miracles recorded in the scriptures. But to this obvious consequence of his hypothesis, Mr. Paine had certainly given no attention. In the same manner, he alone, of all unbelievers, says that none of the books of the Old Testament, were written before the Babylonish captivity. He might with as much plausibility, say that the whole Bible was a publication of the last century.

Facts so interesting to thousands, recorded in this manner, in books universally received as genuine, by those who must have known whether they were so or not, have the testimony not of the writers only,

but of the age in which they were published. In reality, the authenticity of the facts recorded in the New Testament, does not at all depend on the authenticity of the books; for christianity existed, and had made a considerable spread, long before any of the books were written. The books were not the *cause*, but the *effect*, of the belief of it. The authors of these books were not writers by profession, but only wrote when necessity, in a manner, called for them, that is, when those who were best acquainted with the facts, were about to quit the stage, and other persons solicited their testimony to them; and this was not till about thirty years after the death of Christ, when there were Christians in all parts of the Roman empire. The epistles of Paul were written before that time; and in them we find allusions to the state of things, at the time of his writing, and their exact correspondence to the history, would be a strong confirmation of it, if such confirmation were wanting.

7. In the last place, the miracles recorded in the scriptures, produced a great and permanent effect, corresponding to their extraordinary nature; which abundantly proves that they were believed by those before whom they were exhibited, or who had an opportunity of informing themselves concerning them. Those which were wrought in Egypt, effected the deliverance of the Israelites, from their state of servitude in that country, though they were then the most unwarlike, and their masters perhaps the most warlike people in the world, and exceedingly desirous to detain them.

But what was much more than this, addicted as the Israelites were to the religious rites of the Egyptians, and fond of similar rites, in the religions of all the neighbouring nations, such an impression was made upon them by the miracles wrought in their favour, and especially the delivery of the law from mount Sinai, that they actually adopted a very complex system of religion, the reverse of any thing of  
the

the kind, to which they had been accustomed, and which they were far from being predisposed to like, or to receive; and in all their apostacies afterwards, it does not appear that they ever disbelieved the facts. They only thought they might join the worship of other gods with that of their own, at least with the acknowledgment of the truth of their own, which was then the prevailing sentiment of all nations, who scrupled not to admit the pretensions of other gods along with their own, and to join in their worship, especially in the countries supposed to be under their immediate protection, which was the case with respect to the modes of worship, to which the Israelites so often revolted. On the other hand, it appears, that the neighbouring nations entertained the greatest respect for the God, and the religion, of the Israelites, though they did not conform to it. This was the case with the Philistines, the Syrians, the Babylonians, and the Persians; as it would be easy to shew by facts in their history.

The

The effect produced by the miracles recorded in the New Testament was still more evident, because more extensive. Many thousands of the Jews became converts to christianity on its first promulgation, notwithstanding their extreme aversion to receive any scheme of the kind, from their attachment to their antient religion, which they thought to be incompatible with the new, especially after the admission of the Gentiles into the christian church. From this time, indeed, Jewish converts were much less numerous than before, this circumstance shocking their prejudices in a peculiar manner. Many of those who were already christians were exceedingly offended at it.

But the most extensive effect of the miracles wrought by Christ and the apostles was the reception of christianity by the Gentiles, attached as they were to the rites of their antient religions, which were enforced by the laws, and recommended by all the learning and philosophy of the age, and notwithstanding the  
preachers

preachers of the gospel laboured under the greatest disadvantages, being Jews, generally illiterate, and destitute of any talent of public speaking or writing, and having nothing to promise their converts but happiness in another world, with persecution in this. Yet with all these disadvantages, in a reasonable space of time, and exceedingly short, considering the magnitude of the event, a complete revolution was effected in all the Roman empire, which at that time comprehended almost all the civilized part of the world; the heathen religion which had prevailed from time immemorial, being every where discredited, and new rites and customs the reverse of them, adopted.

No revolution produced by force of arms can be compared to this, which was effected without arms, by the mere force of truth, the evidence of which must have been invincibly strong to have prevailed as it did. Incredulous as unbelievers now are, thousands, as incredulous as they, and more interested than they can be,

be, to discredit christianity, became converts to it; and therefore, though they now give little attention to the evidence, which does not force itself upon them, as it did upon those who lived nearer to the time of the transactions, had they lived in those times, they might, with the same indisposition to this religion, have been unable to resist the evidence with which the publication of it was accompanied. To do themselves and the question justice, they should put themselves in the place of their predecessors, consider how the evidence stood in their time, what was then objected to christianity by men as quicksighted and as prejudiced as themselves, and say whether they would abide by their objections. They certainly would not, because they go upon quite different principles, and such as all modern unbelievers would reject, and even with more contempt, than they reject christianity. Will they now ascribe the miracles of Christ and his apostles to the power of magic?

The

The state of the argument very near to the promulgation of christianity is easily ascertained, and certainly ought to be particularly attended to. All that the antient unbelievers objected to christianity, has been carefully collected by Dr. Lardner, in his excellent work on *Jewish and Heathen Testimonies*, and a summary view of the whole may be seen in the second part of my *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever*. But *inattention*, joined to *aversion*, to any subject will account for any degree of incredulity with respect to it. Several among the most considerable unbelievers in France will not admit that there ever was any such person as Jesus Christ; when with more reason they might say there were never such persons as Alexander the Great, or Julius Cæsar.

But the greatest effect produced by the miracles recorded in the New Testament, an effect far more difficult to be accomplished than any change of *opinion*, or speculative principles, is from vice to virtue, which, however, was produced in thousands.

thousands. For this we have the testimony of all history. *Be not deceived*, says the apostle Paul, 1 Corin. vi. 9, *neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God, that is by the power of christianity and its evidences, commonly called the gift of the spirit.*

If we compare the evidence of the miracles recorded in the scriptures with that of any that are mentioned by heathen writers, we shall soon be convinced of the superiority of that of the former. Mr. Hume says, that the cure of the blind and the lame man, said by Tacitus and Suetonius to have been performed by the emperor Vespasian, at Alexandria, is ‘one of the best attested of any in profane history,’ and he meant, I doubt not, in any history.

But

But this boasted miracle is not related by any person who was present. The oldest account we have of it being written about thirty years after the event. It was not exhibited before enemies. Such cures as these might easily have been pretended by persons prepared beforehand. The heathens were very credulous with respect to things of this kind, and the report of these might be very useful to procure credit to the new emperor. There was no scrutiny into the truth of the fact at the time. Indeed such scrutiny would have been discountenanced, and not have been very safe. And lastly, the pretended miracles do not appear to have produced any effect. It is even almost certain, that the historians themselves did not believe them. What then must have been the force of prejudice in a man who could think that these miracles were better attested than those of the scriptures?

Such, my brethren, is the outline, for it is nothing more, of the evidence of the credibility of the miracles recorded in the  
Old

Old and New Testament. It is readily acknowledged, that the great truths to be proved by them, have nothing in them incredible, but on the contrary, are of such a nature as to be both desirable in themselves, and probable, *a priori* (considering the state of vice and ignorance in which the world was involved, when destitute of that light, and considering the benevolence of our common parent, who indeed permits all evils, but only for a time, and makes them subservient to good) they yet require much stronger evidence than ordinary facts, in proportion to their want of analogy to such events as fall under our daily observation. But notwithstanding this, the evidence for them is abundantly sufficient for the purpose. The miracles, as I have shewn, were sufficiently numerous, they were performed on the largest scale, they were, from their nature, free from any suspicion of trick and imposition, they were exhibited in the presence of persons the least predisposed to believe them, or to be influenced by them; they  
were

were subjected to the most rigorous examination at the time, and while they were recent, the written accounts of them were of the same age with the events themselves, and they actually produced the most extraordinary effects; which proves that they were fully assented to at the time, by those who had the best opportunity of inquiring into the truth, and the strongest motives for doing so.

More than this it is not in the power of any person to require, and therefore it is all that is necessary to the most complete satisfaction. I mean of the candid and attentive.

For there is a state of mind in which no evidence can have any effect, as we see every day, and we must not expect that miracles will now be wrought for the conviction of any persons, and least of all miraculous changes in the dispositions of men's minds. Indeed, such miracles as those do not appear ever to have been wrought. All miracles were external, and the reflection on them produced its natural effect,

effect, on the minds of those who gave due attention to them; and who were suitably impressed with them.

As to the proper time for working miracles, and making this or that age the witnesses of them, and of course the vouchers of their reality to others, it is a question which we must acknowledge we are not able to answer. But neither does it concern us to answer it, any more than to assign a reason why it pleased the Divine Being to create the world, or men and other animals, at one time rather than another, or why he did not make more or fewer planets to attend the sun, &c. &c. Of every thing of this nature, he alone is the proper judge. It is enough for us if we be satisfied, on sufficient evidence, that miracles have been wrought at any time, and if we have been informed of the purpose for which they were wrought. If they were actually seen by others, though at ever so great a distance of time, they ought, in reason, to have the same effect as if seen by ourselves, and we are as inexcusable

excusable, if we be not as much influenced by them. And if God has spoken, it cannot be a matter of indifference, whether we will attend to his voice or not. In this case I may say, after our Saviour, *He that bath ears to hear, let him hear.*

## DISCOURSE XI.

### *The proof of Revealed Religion from Prophecy.*

---

I have even from the beginning declared it unto thee. Before it came to pass I shewed it thee, lest thou shouldest say mine idol has done them, and my graven image, and my molten image, have commanded them.

ISAIAH. xlviii. 5.

THERE is not, perhaps, any thing more exclusively within the province of the Supreme Being than the foreknowledge of future events, depending on the volitions of men. For though all things future may be said to exist in their causes, which are present, those causes are not apparent, and their operations and combinations, are such as no human intellect can trace; so that to us they are as contingent, and uncertain, as if the causes did not exist. They who know mankind

in general, and even particular persons, the best, can only *conjecture* how they will act in given circumstances, and are often mistaken; but how they will act in *future time*, when it cannot be known in what circumstances they will then be, is what no man will pretend to, and this still less with respect to persons then unborn. A prediction of a future and distant event, depending on the voluntary actions of men, has therefore the effect of a miracle of the most indisputable kind. Now many such are recorded in the scriptures, and consequently ought to be enumerated among the clearest proofs of their divine authority, and of the truth of the religion they contain. For this reason I shall make them the subject of this discourse, shewing, from the circumstances of the predictions, that they are not liable to any just suspicion of imposture, that in this respect they were the reverse of the oracles of the heathens, and that they have been clearly verified by the events.

There

There were two ways in which the knowledge of future events was communicated to the Hebrews. One was by consulting the *oracle*, as it may be called, when answers to particular questions were given to the high-priest; and the other by prophets, who were raised up from time to time to speak to the people in the name of God. I shall consider the circumstances of both.

1. The regular method of consulting the divine oracle, called *inquiring of the Lord*, was by the chief magistrate attending in the sanctuary along with the high-priest in his proper vestments, directing him what questions to put; when the answers were equally heard by them both. Thus when Joshua was appointed to succeed Moses, it is said, Num. xxvii. 26. *And he shall stand by Eleazar the priest, who shall ask council for him, after the judgment of Urim, before the Lord.* From this it is obvious, that it was not in the power of the high-priest to impose upon the country what he thought proper, as a divine ora-

cle. It does not even appear that he ever went of his own accord to consult the oracle, but only when required to do so by the civil magistrate, who attended along with him, and heard the answer as well as himself. Of this we have several examples in the course of the scripture history. Indeed, it is evident from the whole history of the Hebrews, that neither by this, nor by any other means, was it in the power of the priests to acquire any more authority than was given them in the original constitution.

If this had been the case, they would always have preserved their superiority over any occasional prophet, whose claim to respect interfered with theirs. How, for example, could it be supposed that the old high-priest Eli would easily have acquiesced in the divine communications made to the child Samuel, which contained the heaviest denunciations against himself and his family? But instead of contradicting them, though delivered by a mere child, he, with the greatest resignation, replied,

replied, *It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.* Surely here was no priestcraft. Neither under the judges, nor under the kings, did any high-priest acquire the smallest addition to his civil power, or to his emolument.

2. The Hebrew oracle appears to have been accessible at all times alike; which was not the case with the oracles of Greece. That at Delphi could only be consulted during one particular month in the year, which was in the spring; and, as it should seem, only on a few stated days in that month. At other times, as we are informed, the greatest princes could not by any means obtain an answer. This certainly gave the heathen priests a better opportunity of knowing what questions were likely to be proposed, and of being prepared with the answers.

3. No expence attended the consultation of the Hebrew oracle, so that the priests could not derive any emolument from it; whereas the consulting of the Grecian oracles was so very expensive, on account of the  
the

the sacrifices that were to be offered, and the presents that were expected on the occasion, that only the great and the wealthy could have access to them. The riches of which the temple of Delphi was possessed, from the donations of opulent princes, such as Cræsus king of Lydia, were immense; but it does not appear that either the tabernacle, or the temple, of the Israelites, gained any thing by this means.

4. Nothing was done to overawe the persons who consulted the Hebrew oracle; or to affect their imaginations, so as to prepare them to receive whatever answers the priest, who directed the oracle, might suggest; which was the case more or less, with all the Grecian oracles, but especially that of Trophonius. The person who consulted this oracle went into a cavern, and and not immediately, on his presenting himself, but after much solemn preparation.\*

\* In this time all his food was the remains of sacrifices, and he was not permitted to bathe. After this he was washed by boys of thirteen years of age, and when this was done, he drank of two waters, one of oblivion, and the other of remembrance, and before he entered the cavern he was brought

Such were the marks of terror and melancholy with which persons usually came out of this cavern, that when any person was unusually dejected, they said he looked as if he had been consulting the oracle of Trophonius.

5. The answer of the Hebrew oracle was always delivered in an articulate voice, which was not liable to misconstruction; whereas all the Grecian oracles, except that of Apollo, gave their answers in a different manner, as by dreams, the flight  
of

to a certain statue, before which he made some prayers. Being then conducted to the mouth of the cavern, he descended by a ladder, which he brought with him for the purpose. At the bottom of this descent he came to a narrow passage, through which he was required to thrust himself with his feet foremost; but during this he was forcibly dragged along till he came to the place where he was to wait for his answer, which was sometimes given in words, and sometimes only by appearances of various kinds. After this, which sometimes detained him more than a day, he returned through the narrow passage in the same manner as before, viz. with his feet foremost. The priests then placed him on a kind of throne, and inquired of him what he had heard or seen, and they made the report to others, who then carried him, commonly in a state of stupefaction, with terror and astonishment, to the chapel of good genies, and of  
good

of birds, or the entrails of beasts, &c. &c. At Pheræ, a city of Achaia, there was an oracle of Mercury, where the person who consulted it, after making the proper sacrifices and offerings, proposed his question; and in order to get an answer to it, walked with his ears stopped by his hands, through the market-place, and then removing them, took the first words that he happened to hear for the answer of the oracle. At another oracle in Achaia, the answer was given by throwing dice, inscribed with particular characters, which the priests interpreted. At another place  
in

good fortune, where after some time he recovered his senses and cheerfulness. This account is given by Pausanias, an eminent Greek writer, who says that he had himself consulted this oracle.

Another person, of whom Plutarch gives an account, was detained two days and nights in this cavern, and when he came out he gave an account of many strange sights that he had seen, and frightful sounds that he had heard, resembling the yellings and howlings of wild beasts, as well as a discourse that was delivered to him. Who does not see that it was in the power of the priests to conduct all this machinery just as they pleased, taking advantage of the terror which was unavoidable in these circumstances ?

in the same country, the answer of the oracle, which was only given to questions relating to sickness, was given by letting down a mirror into a fountain, and observing the figures and images on its surface.

6. There was no ambiguity in the answer given by the Hebrew oracle. It was always plain and direct, not capable of two constructions, of which the priests might avail themselves on comparing it with the event, as was remarkably the case with respect to many of the answers returned by the Grecian oracles, even that of Apollo at Delphi, which, however, was celebrated for the comparative perspicuity of its answers. Two of these answers are particularly mentioned by Herodotus.

When the Lacedemonians inquired of the oracle whether they should succeed in their attempt to conquer all Arcadia, they received for answer, they should not, but that he would give them *Tegea*, which

was

was very fruitful, and which they should measure with a line. On this they had no doubt but that they should gain the possession of it; but being defeated in battle, many of the Lacedemonians were made prisoners, and compelled to cultivate the ground for their conquerors; and in doing this, they made use of a line to measure it, which was deemed to be a fulfilment of the oracle. Again, when Cræsus consulted the same oracle, on his engaging in a war with Cyrus, he received for answer, that if he did, he should overturn a great empire, and that the Persians would not conquer him until they had a mule for their prince. Being conquered, and losing his empire, he sent to upbraid the oracle for deceiving him, but he was answered, that the empire that was to be overturned was his own, and that Cyrus being descended from a Persian father, and a Median mother, was the mule intended by the oracle.

The Hebrew oracle never returned such answers as these, but always such as  
were

were direct, and perfectly intelligible. The divine oracle subsisted, though in some different manner, before the time of Moses. For we read that Rebecca, when she found herself with child, and felt a violent motion in her womb, inquired of the Lord, and received the following answer, Gen. xxv. 23, *Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels. The one shall be stronger than the other, and the elder shall serve the younger.*

When the oracle was consulted after the death of Joshua, we read, Jud. i. 1. *Then Israel asked the Lord, saying, Who shall go up, for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them, Jehovah said Judah shall go up, behold I have delivered the land into his hand.* David, in the course of his life, received several answers from the oracle, one of which was very particular. The Philistines spreading themselves, as we read, 2 Sam. v. 23. in the valley of Rephaim, when David inquired of the Lord,

Lord, he said, *Thou shalt not go up, but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees; and let it be when thou hearest the sound of a marching in the top of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself, for then shall the Lord go out before thee to smite the host of the Philistines.* We have no account of any other answer from this oracle, that was not equally plain, and free from ambiguity.

All the directions and predictions that were occasionally delivered by the God of Israel, or by angels commissioned by him, were equally clear and intelligible. Such was the original command given to Abraham, Gen. xii. 1. ‘Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee, and I will make of thee a great nation, and thou shalt be a blessing.’ Such was the message to Hagar when she fled from her mistress, Genesis. xvi. 11. ‘And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Behold thou art with child, and shalt bear

‘ bear a son, and call his name Ishmael,  
‘ and he will be a wild man; his hand will  
‘ be against every man, and every man’s  
‘ hand against him, and he shall dwell in  
‘ the presence of all his brethren.’ A prediction which has been exactly verified in the general character, and history, of the Arabs, who are descended from Ishmael, to this very day. All the commands of God to Moses were perspicuous, and free from ambiguity; and so were all the divine communications without any exception.

Sometimes communications were made in dreams, and by means of emblems; but the interpretations were given in the most intelligible language. Thus Joseph in the interpretation of their respective dreams, told Pharoah’s baker, that after three days he would be hanged, and that the butler would at the same time be restored to his office; and he told Pharoah that the next seven years would be years of unusual plenty, but would be followed by seven years of famine. The prophetic dreams of Nebuchadnezzar were interpreted

preted with the same distinctness by Daniel, and Daniel's own dreams by an angel.

Besides the regular *oracle*, to which the Israelites had access on particular emergencies, God was pleased to send to that nation a succession of *prophets*, and they all delivered their messages in the plainest language, as became the messengers of God. The greatest, and strictly speaking, the first, of these prophets, was Moses; and nothing could be more distinct and intelligible than the manner in which he always spake in the name of God, on a great variety of occasions; and he was informed that there would be a succession of prophets, like himself, Deut. xviii. 18. ‘I will raise them up a prophet among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I command him.’

An example of this we have in the message which the prophet Ahijah was directed to deliver to Jerusalem, of which

we

we have an account 1 Kings, xi. 29. ‘ And  
‘ it came to pass at that time, when Je-  
‘ roboam went out of Jerufalem,’ (which  
was in the reign of Solomon,) ‘ that the  
‘ prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him  
‘ in the way, and he clad himself in a new  
‘ garment, and they two were alone in  
‘ the field. And Ahijah caught the new  
‘ garment that was on him, and rent it in  
‘ twelve pieces. And he said to Jerobo-  
‘ am, Take thee ten pieces. For thus  
‘ saith the Lord, the God of Israel. Be-  
‘ hold I will rend the kingdom out of the  
‘ hand of Solomon, and will give ten  
‘ tribes to thee, because they have for-  
‘ faken me, and have worshipped Ashta-  
‘ roth, the goddess of the Sidonians, Che-  
‘ mosh the god of the Moabites, and Mil-  
‘ com the god of the children of Ammon,  
‘ and have not walked in my way, to do  
‘ that which is right in mine eyes, to keep  
‘ my statutes and my judgments, as did  
‘ David his father. Howbeit, I will not  
‘ take the whole kingdom out of his hand,  
‘ but I will make him a prince all the  
‘ days

‘ days of his life, for my fervant David’s  
 ‘ fake, whom I chose, becaufe he kept  
 ‘ my commandments and my statutes:  
 ‘ but I will take the kingdom out of his  
 ‘ son’s hand, and will give it unto thee,  
 ‘ even ten tribes, &c.’ In the same plain  
 and direct manner, did all the prophets  
 deliver themselves; as Elijah to Ahab,  
 Ifaiah to Ahaz,\* and Hezekiah, and Jere-  
 miah to Zedekiah. With the same dis-  
 tinctness did our Saviour deliver his pro-  
 phesy concerning the destruction of Jeru-  
 salem, the demolition of the temple, and  
 the desolation of Judea.

Let this be compared with the manner  
 in which the pretended prophets among  
 the

\* Mr. Paine charges Ifaiah with being a false prophet in  
 what he announced to Ahaz, concerning the invasion of  
 his kingdom by Rezin king of Syria, and Pekah king of  
 Israel, which was as follows. Isaii vii. 1, ‘ And it came  
 ‘ to pass in the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham king of  
 ‘ Judah, that Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of  
 ‘ Remaliah, king of Israel, went up towards Jerusalem to war  
 ‘ against it, but could not prevail against it. And it was told  
 ‘ the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Eph-  
 ‘ raim; and his heart was moved as the trees of the wood  
 ‘ are moved with the wind. Then said the Lord unto Ifaiah,  
 ‘ Go

the heathens delivered themselves. It was always in a kind of madness, or ecstasy, to give the appearance of some other being than themselves speaking from within them, or making use of their organs. When the pythones at Delphi delivered the oracle, with which she was supposed to be inspired, she began to swell and foam at the mouth, tearing her hair, cutting her flesh, and

‘Go forth now to meet Ahaz, thou and Shear-Jashub thy son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, in the high way of the Fullers field, and say unto him, Take heed and be quiet, fear not, neither be faint-hearted, for the two tails of these smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and of the son of Remaliah, because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah have taken evil council against thee, saying, Let us go up against Judah and vex it, and let us make a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal. Thus saith the Lord God, it shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass.’ He farther assured him that before a child that was soon to be born could distinguish between good and evil, the countries of his enemies would be ‘forsaken of both their kings.’

On this Mr. Paine says, p. 47, ‘To shew the imposition and falsehood of Isaiah, we have only to attend to the sequel of this story, which, though it is passed over in silence in the book of Isaiah, is related in the 20th chapter of 2 Chronicles, and which is, that, instead of these two kings failing in their attempt against Ahaz king of Judah, as Isaiah had pretended to foretel in the name of the Lord, they succeeded.

and in all her behaviour appearing as if distracted. One of them was at one time so enraged, that she terrified not only those who consulted the oracle, but the priests themselves, so that they ran away and left her, and soon after she died. Others, who were supposed to pry into futurity, lay like dead men, deprived of all sense and motion, and when they returned to themselves,

‘ceeded. Ahaz was defeated and destroyed, an hundred and twenty thousand of his people were slaughtered, Jerusalem was plundered, and two hundred thousand women, and sons and daughters, were carried into captivity. Thus much for this lying prophet and impostor Isaiah, and the book of falsehoods that bears his name.’

Such is the charge, but the defence is extremely easy. The calamity which Mr. Paine, with much exaggeration describes, was in the beginning of the reign of Ahaz, before the prophecy was delivered. For it commenced about the death of Jotham his predecessor. After reciting the events of the reign of Jotham, the historian says, 2 Kings, xv. 37, ‘In these days the Lord began to send against Judah, Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah. And Jotham slept with his fathers, and Ahaz his son reigned in his stead.’

This calamity, great as it was, by no means extended so far as Mr. Paine asserts. For Jerusalem was so far from being plundered, that it is expressly said, 2 Kings, xvi. 5. ‘That these two kings came up to Jerusalem to war, and they besieged Ahaz, but they could not overcome him.’

Agreeably

themselves, they related what they had seen and heard. For it was their opinion that the soul might leave the body, wander up and down the world, visit the regions of the dead, and even converse with gods and heroes. Plutarch relates that while the soul of one Hermodorus of Clazomenæ was thus out of his body, a woman who had the custody of it, delivered it to his enemies, who burned it.

Agreeably to this, Isaiah says 'they went up towards Jerusalem, to war against it, but could not prevail against it.' And so far were they from being able to dethrone Ahaz, and set up another king, the son of Tabeal, that Ahaz reigned sixteen years, and in the fourth year of his reign Pekah king of Israel was slain in a conspiracy of his own subject, 1. Kings, xv. 30. and about the same time an end was put to the kingdom of Syria by Tiglath Pileser king of Assyria taking Damascus, whither Ahaz went to meet him.

Mr. Paine takes advantage of the figurative and no doubt hyperbolical language of the prophet Ezekiel, in his account of the desolation of Egypt during forty years after the conquest of the country by Nebuchadnezzar, chap. xxix. 11. 'that no foot of man or of beast should pass through it.' We have no particular account of the state of Egypt in this interval, but the civil war between Apries or Pharoah Hophra and Amasis, which followed the devastation made by Nebuchadnezzar, must have made travelling particularly hazardous.

The delivery of prophecies in a frantic manner, as if the prophet was possessed by some demon, is still practised in several barbarous nations, as in Tartary, and among the Indians of some parts of America, of which travellers give amusing accounts. In fact, when the Grecian oracles were instituted, that nation had as little knowledge as the Tartars, or Indians. At this day the random sayings of ideots, and persons disordered in their senses, are caught up in the East, as if they came from the inspiration of some superior being.

But the principal question before us is, not in what manner prophecies were delivered, but whether predictions said to come from God, and, as such, recorded in scripture have been verified by the events. And to this the Divine Being himself appeals. When the succession of prophets mentioned above was announced to Moses, he says, Deut. xviii. 21, ‘ If thou shalt  
‘ say in thine heart, how shall we know  
‘ the word which the Lord hath not spoken?  
‘ it

it is answered, ‘ When a prophet speaketh  
‘ in the name of the Lord, if the thing  
‘ follow not, nor come to pass, this is  
‘ the thing which the Lord hath not  
‘ spoken, but the prophet hath spoken pre-  
‘ sumptuously. Thou shalt not be afraid  
‘ of him.’ And on this subject it is that  
Jehovah challenges the gods of the hea-  
thens, in Isaiah xli. 21, ‘ Produce your  
‘ cause, saith the Lord, bring forth your  
‘ strong reasons, saith the God of Jacob.  
‘ Let them bring them forth, and shew us  
‘ what shall happen. Let them shew for-  
‘ mer things what they be, that we may  
‘ consider them, and know the latter end  
‘ of them, or declare us things for to  
‘ come. Shew the things that are to  
‘ come hereafter, that we may know that  
‘ ye are gods.’ This is what no heathen  
oracle or prophet could do. But the scrip-  
tures abound with prophecies which have  
indisputably been verified by the events,  
and in some cases, at a great distance from  
the time of their delivery.

There

There are few prophecies more remarkable than those of Moses, which extend even to the present times, and indeed far beyond them. When his nation was in a state little better than that of the wild Arabs, wandering in the wilderness; he not only looked forward to their certainly taking possession of the land of Canaan, then inhabited by a warlike people, who had horses and chariots of iron, and whose cities are said to have been fenced up to heaven, and who had many years notice of the intended attack upon them, when none of the Israelites had seen war, when they were poorly provided with weapons, and could only fight on foot, and must have been wholly unacquainted with the method of attacking fortified places; but he foretold their apostacy from their religion, their consequent expulsion from the land of Canaan, their dispersion into all the most distant parts of the world, their cruel sufferings, and contemptuous treatment, in those countries, of which we near three thousand years after the prediction, are now witnesses,

witnesses, their subsisting, notwithstanding this, as a separate people, of which also we are witnesses, and likewise their final restoration, and resettlement in their own country, when they are to be the most distinguished of all nations. But I do not enlarge on this subject, because I have done it already, in a discourse which is before the public.

There is no nation bordering on the land of Canaan, whose future destiny was not foretold by some of the Hebrew prophets, and there is no pretence for saying that the predictions were written after the events. For the accomplishment of several of them is quite recent; whereas the books have been extant between two and three thousand years. I shall confine myself to those concerning Egypt, Babylon, and Tyre, with some observations on the prophecies of Daniel.

1. The Egyptians were the first nation that rose to any great degree of power, and they continued in the first rank of warlike people, till they were conquered  
by

by Nebuchadnezzar. But several years before that conquest, viz. in the tenth year of the captivity of Jehoiakim, three years before he undertook the siege of Tyre, and fourteen before his invasion of Egypt, *the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel, as we read, Ez. xxix. i. &c. saying, Son of man, set thy face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophecy against him, and against all Egypt. Speak and say, Thus saith the Lord God, Behold I am against thee Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, who has said, My river is my own, and I have made it for myself\*. But I will put hooks in thy jaws, and I will bring thee up out of the midst of thy rivers. And I will leave thee thrown into the wilderness. I have given thee for meat to the beasts of the field, and to the fowls of heaven, and all the inhabitants of Egypt shall know that I am the Lord, because they have been a staff of reed to the house of Israel.*

\* This king of Egypt Pharaoh Hophra (called Apries by Herodotus) was remarkable for his pride and impiety. According to this historian, he boasted that it was not in the power of the gods to dethrone him.

*rael. Thus saith the Lord God, I will bring a sword upon thee, and cut off man and beast out of thee, and the land of Egypt shall be desolate and waste, and they shall know that I am the Lord. He then foretels a state of desolation, which was to continue in Egypt forty years, after which he says, v. 14. 15. they shall be a base kingdom. It shall be the basest of the kingdoms, neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations, for I will diminish them, that they shall no more rule over the nations.*

A short time before Nebuchadnezzar's expedition, Ezekiel again prophesied as follows, Chap. xxx. 10. *I will also make the multitude of Egypt to cease by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, he and his people with him. The terrible of the nations shall be brought to destroy the land, and they shall draw their swords against Egypt, and fill the land with the slain, and I will make the river dry\*, and sell the land into the hand of the wicked,*

\* This is a figurative expression, denoting probably that the river, of which this king made so great a boast, should not avail him when he was invaded by his enemy. It should be as easily passed, as if its channel had been dry.

*wicked, and I will make the land waste, and all that is therein by the hand of strangers. I the Lord have spoken it. Thus saith the Lord God, I will also destroy the idols, and I will cause their images to cease out of Noph, and there shall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt, and I will put a fear in the land of Egypt.*

The history of Egypt from that time to the present, which is more than two thousand years, corresponds in a remarkable manner to this prediction; that country having been ever since under the dominion of foreigners, viz. the Babylonians, Persians, Macedonians, Romans, Saracens, Mamluks, and Turks. And, judging from appearances, it is not at all probable that the Egyptians will ever recover their liberty, and have a king of their own. Indeed, Egypt has been so often conquered and enslaved, so many persons of foreign extraction have settled in it, that it must be hard to say who of the present inhabitants are of the stock of the antient Egyptians. But it is not probable that any native of  
the

the country, of whatever stock, will ever have the sovereignty of it.

2. Ifaiah lived in the reign of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, about one hundred and fifty years before the conquests of Nebuchadnezzar, and more than two hundred before those of Cyrus, while the kingdom of Babylon was inferior to that of the Assyrians, yet he foretold the fall of the Babylonian empire, in language peculiarly emphatical, and his predictions have been verified by the events in a most remarkable manner, some of the particulars not having taken place, till many ages had elapsed. Ifaiah xiii. 9. *Babylon the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation, neither shall the Arabian pitch his tent there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures, and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there, and wild beasts of the islands (that is foreign wild beasts) shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons*

*dragons in their pleasant palaces, and the time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged. He also says, Chap. xiv. 22. I will rise up against them, saith the Lord of hosts, and cut off from Babylon the name and remnant, and son, and nephew, saith the Lord. I will also make it a possession for bitterns, and pools of water; and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith the Lord of hosts. The prophet even mentioned the nations, then in their very infant state, by which Babylon would be conquered, when he said, chap. xxi. 2. Go up Elam, (i. e. Persia) besiege, O Media, for they were the Medes and Persians in conjunction that overturned the Babylonian empire.*

Jeremiah, who lived in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, at the time when the Babylonian empire was in its greatest strength and glory, prophesied to the same purport with Isaiah, chap. 50. ‘Lo, ‘I will raise up, and cause to come up ‘against Babylon, an assembly of great ‘nations from the north country, and ‘they shall set themselves in array against  
‘her.

‘ her. From thence she shall be taken.  
‘ Because of the wrath of the Lord it shall  
‘ not be inhabited, but it shall be wholly  
‘ desolate. Every one that goeth by Ba-  
‘ bylon shall be astonished, and hiss at all  
‘ her plagues, for it is a land of graven  
‘ images, and they are mad upon their  
‘ idols. Therefore the wild beasts of the  
‘ desert, and the wild beasts of the islands,  
‘ shall dwell there, and the owls shall  
‘ dwell therein, and it shall be no more  
‘ inhabited for ever, neither shall it be  
‘ dwelt in from generation to generation.’

This prophet also mentions the names of the future enemies of Babylon, chap. li. 11. ‘ The Lord shall raise up the spirit  
‘ of the kings of the Medes; for his devise  
‘ is against Babylon to destroy it.’ The duration of the captivity of his countrymen by the Babylonians, Jeremiah exactly foretold. After mentioning the conquests of this nation, he proceeds thus, chap. xxv. 11, ‘ Those nations shall serve  
‘ the king of Babylon seventy years, and  
‘ it shall come to pass, that when seventy  
years

‘ years are accomplished, I will punish the  
‘ king of Babylon, and that nation, saith  
‘ the Lord.’ Chap. xxix. 10, ‘ For thus  
‘ saith the Lord, that after seventy years  
‘ be accomplished at Babylon, I will visit  
‘ you, and perform my good word to-  
‘ wards you, in causing you to return to  
‘ this place.’

The prophecies concerning the desolation of Babylon were not fulfilled in their full extent, till long after the time of our Saviour. Babylon was taken by Cyrus exactly seventy years after the conquest of Judea; but it was not reduced to the state mentioned in these prophecies but by slow degrees. Cyrus having taken the city by turning the river which flowed through it out of its channel, all the neighbourhood became marshy and unhealthy. Diodorus Siculus, who wrote a little before the time of our Saviour, says, that the buildings of Babylon were then decayed, that only a small part of it was inhabited, and that the rest of the inclosure was employed in tillage. Pliny, who wrote in the  
first

first century after Christ, says that Babylon was then reduced to solitude, being exhausted by the neighbourhood of Seleucia, which was not far from it. Pausanias, who wrote about the middle of the second century, says, that “ of Babylon the greatest city that the sun ever saw, there was “ nothing remaining but the walls;” and Lucian, who wrote about the same time, says, that very soon it would, like Nineveh, be sought for, and not be found. In the time of Jerom, who lived in the fourth century, the whole inclosure of the walls of Babylon was actually converted into a place for keeping wild beasts, and was used for that and no other purpose by many of the kings of Persia. At length, even the walls of this great city, so much celebrated for their height and thickness, were demolished, but by whom is not known. About seven hundred years ago, Benjamin a Jew, found some remains of the ruins of Babylon, but people were afraid to go among them on account of the serpents and scorpions with which it swarmed,

ed,

ed, and at present it is not agreed among travellers, in what place the great city of Babylon stood. In this case, surely, there cannot be any pretence for saying that the prediction was subsequent to the event, and yet no event was ever more distinctly described.

What is perhaps, however, more remarkable still, Isaiah mentions *Cyrus* by name, as the conqueror of Babylon, and the person who was destined to favour the people of Israel, by ordering the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple, though in his time they were both standing. Isa. lxiv. 22. ‘ Thus saith the Lord, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the Lord that maketh all things, that stretcheth forth the heavens above, that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself; that saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited, and to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built, and I will raise up the decayed places thereof; that saith to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up their rivers, that saith to Cyrus, he

‘ he is my shepherd, and shall perform all  
‘ my pleasure, even saying to Jerusalem,  
‘ thou shalt be built, and to the temple,  
‘ thy foundation shall be laid. Thus saith  
‘ the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus,  
‘ whose right hand I have holden, to sub-  
‘ due nations before him, and I will loose  
‘ the loins of kings, to open before him  
‘ the two-leaved gates. I will break in  
‘ pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sun-  
‘ der the bars of iron. And I will give thee  
‘ the treasures of darkness, and hidden  
‘ riches of secret places, that thou mayest  
‘ know that I the Lord, who call thee by  
‘ thy name, am the God of Israel. I  
‘ have furnished thee though thou hast  
‘ not known me. I am the Lord, and  
‘ there is none else. There is no god be-  
‘ sides me. I girded thee though thou  
‘ hast not known me; that they may know  
‘ from the rising of the sun, and from  
‘ the West, that there is none besides  
‘ me. I am the Lord, and there is none  
‘ else. I form the light, and create dark-

‘nefs: I make peace, and create evil; I  
‘the Lord do all thefe things.’

3. Not lefs remarkably have the prophecies concerning Tyre, received their accomplifhment. In the eleventh year after the captivity of the Jews, which was before the fiege of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar, Ezekiel fays, Chap. xxvi. 1. ‘The  
‘word of the Lord came unto me, faying,  
‘Son of man, becaufe that Tyrus hath  
‘faid againft Jerufalem, Aha, ſhe is broken,  
‘that was the gate of the people,  
‘ſhe is turned unto me, I ſhall be replenifhed  
‘now ſhe is laid waſte. Therefore thus  
‘faith the Lord God, Behold I am againft  
‘thee, O Tyrus, and will caufe many nations  
‘to come up againft thee, and they  
‘ſhall deſtroy the walls of Tyrus, and  
‘break down her towers. I will alfo  
‘ſcrape her duſt from her, and make her  
‘like the top of a rock. It ſhall be a  
‘place for the ſpreading of nets in the  
‘midſt of the ſea, for I have ſpoken it  
‘faith the Lord God, and it ſhall become a  
‘ſpoil

‘ spoil to the nations.’ It is added v. 14.  
‘ Thou shalt be built no more.’

When this prophecy was delivered Tyre was in its glory, probably the most wealthy and the strongest city in the world. It was taken by Nebuchadnezzar, but not till it had sustained a siege of thirteen years. That city was never rebuilt, but another on an island, at the distance of half a mile from the shore, which in time became as flourishing, and as powerful, as the former. This, however, was taken by Alexander the Great, and it never recovered itself. It is now a heap of ruins, visited, not inhabited, by a few fishermen. A traveller, who, about a century ago gave an account of it, says that when he approached the ruins of Tyre, he found rocks stretched out into the sea, and great stones scattered up and down on the shore, made clean smooth by the sun, the waves, and the wind, and of no use but for the drying of fishermen’s nets, many of which were at that time, spread upon them; so that the full completion of this prophecy, deli-

vered above two thousand three hundred years ago, did not take place till within the last two or three centuries.

4. The prophecies of Daniel relate to the most distant times, even those which we have not yet reached; but some of the great events indicated in them by emblems, and afterwards explained in words, have so evidently come to pass, that for this, and no other reason, (which is merely taking the question for granted, against the strongest evidence, internal and external) it has been said, that they must have been written after them.

To Nebuchadnezzar, chap. iv. was revealed in a vision of a great image, consisting of different kinds of metal, overturned by a stone, which afterwards became a great mountain, filling the whole earth, the succession of four great monarchies, of which his own was declared to be the first, and of which the last can be no other than the Roman, terminating in ten kingdoms, which now exist, after which is to come what is called *the kingdom*  
of

*of heaven*, which will continue for ever, and this, according to many other accounts of it, is to be the reign of peace and righteousness.

In another vision, seen by Daniel himself, chap. vii. four great empires, and no doubt the same with the former, are represented by four beasts, the last of which had ten horns, succeeded by the appearance of one like to the son of man, *to whom was given dominion, and glory, and a kingdom which should be universal and everlasting.* The first of these empires being the Babylonian, it is impossible not to interpret the succeeding ones to be the Persian, the Macedonian, and the Roman, divided at last into ten kingdoms as before.

Farther than this, another power is described as arising among the ten kingdoms, in which the last of the four empires terminates, and by this it is almost impossible not to understand, the papal. *I considered the ten horns, says Daniel, chap. vii. 8. and behold there came up among them another*  
*little*

*little horn, before whom were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots, and behold in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things, v. 21. I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them, until the antient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the Most High, and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom. In the interpretation of this, the angel says, v. 24. The ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise, and another shall arise after them, and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings. And he shall speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and think to change times and laws, and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times, and the dividing of time. But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end. The history of the popes, though I cannot now enter into the particulars, corresponds in a wonderful manner with this prediction, delivered unquestionably above a thousand years before the event.*

In another vision, chap. viii. a ram with two horns, the one higher than the other, of which the highest came up last, was destroyed by a he-goat, with one great horn between his eyes, which being broken off four others came up in its place. And in the interpretation it is expressly said, that the ram with two horns represented the empire of the Medes and Persians, of which the latter was more powerful than the former, though it was not so at the first, and that the he-goat represented the kingdom of the Grecians, that the great horn was the first king, and that after him four should stand up out of the nation, but not in his power.

This vision was in the reign of Belshazzar, before the conquest of Babylon by the Medes and Persians, while the Medes were by much the more powerful nation, and therefore long before the conquest of Persia by Alexander, on whose death his dominions were divided among four of his generals. The remainder of this vision, and others, which probably relate to times that

that are yet future, have some difficulty in their interpretation, which time will probably clear up. But if Daniel described the empire of the Greeks or Macedonian, and much more that of the Romans, it cannot be questioned but that the events indicated in his writings, were subsequent to the prediction of them, and such as no human sagacity could at that time discover.

We find the clearest marks of a prophetic spirit in the New Testament, as well as in the Old. Jesus, besides foretelling his own death, and that by crucifixion, with all the circumstances of indignity attending it, also his resurrection and ascension, appears by his parables, to have had a clear foresight of the spread, and final prevalence, of his religion in the world, of the persecution of his followers, the dissention and mischief of which it would for some time be the occasion, and of the corruption of his doctrine. He also foretold in the clearest language, without any figure or parable, the destruction of Jerusalem, the

the total demolition of the temple, and the desolation of the country of Judea, with many signs of its near approach in that generation, when no other person of that nation, or any other, appears to have had the least apprehension of such events. The warning he gave his disciples to flee out of the country on the approach of these calamitous times, was well understood by them, and was the means of saving them all; no Christians being in Jerusalem when it was besieged and taken by Titus.

The apostle Paul forewarns Christians of the rise of a power in the Christian church, which would advance higher claims than those of any other earthly potentate, that he would gain his authority by artifice, and pretences to miracles, that he would recommend abstinence from certain meats, and discourage marriage; but that it would be finally destroyed at the second coming of Christ, 2 Theff. ii. 3. *Let no man deceive you by any means, for there must come a falling away, or an apostacy, first, i. e. before the time of final judgment, and that*  
*man*

*man of sin must be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God---whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming; even him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceitfulness of unrighteousness.*

1 Tim. iv. 1. *The spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons---forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God has created to be received with thanksgiving. A farther description of this same power, is given in the Revelation of John, with the steps by which it rose, and the shocking use that would be made of its power, in the persecution of the church. Certainly all these characters are to be found in the Pope, and the church of Rome, and what probability was there of the rise of any such power, at the time that the prophecies*

cies

cies were delivered? This apostle also gives a sketch of the most interesting events of every kind, from his own time to the end of the world. But as, for evident reasons, this prophecy is delivered in figurative language, and emblems, its correspondence with the events cannot be expected to be apparent, till after they have taken place. And therefore it is not much for the purpose of my present argument, though I think that till pretty near to the present times, the correspondence will be sufficiently evident to the impartial and candid.

But without any regard to these predictions, which are acknowledged to be better calculated to confirm the faith of the believer, than to convert unbelievers, the prophecies I have enumerated, though few in comparison of what might have been adduced, will satisfy any reasonable person, that they must have been dictated by a foresight more than human, and therefore that the Jewish and Christian religions, having the same author, must be of divine authority.

DISCOURSE

## DISCOURSE XII.

*Internal Evidence of Jesus being no  
Impostor.*

---

We are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus  
Christ.

I JOHN, v. 20.

BESIDES the evidence of *miracles*, including that of *prophecy*, which is the proper seal of God to any thing that is alleged to come from him, with which we become acquainted by history, or tradition, and which is usually called the *external evidence* of divine revelation, there is another kind of evidence properly denominated *internal*, which to those who have a sufficient knowledge of human nature and human life, is hardly less satisfactory. For knowing what men are, and what men have done, we readily judge what is probable or improbable, possible or impossible,

fible, with respect to the designs and actions of men; and if any thing be asserted of a man, and especially of a number of men, which we well know could not be asserted with truth of any man, or any number of men, with whom we were ever acquainted, or concerning whom we have had any authentic information, we do not hesitate to pronounce it to be highly improbable, and perhaps absolutely impossible.

It is, therefore, of the greatest importance, that we apply the knowledge we have of human nature, and human life, in our study of the evidences of divine revelation, to attend accurately to the characters and circumstances of Moses and the prophets, of Christ and the apostles, that we may form a judgment whether what is related of them, on the supposition of their having had divine communications; or of their having been impostors, be probable or otherwise. Having in a former set of discourses considered the circumstances of the history of Moses, I shall in this consider the history of Jesus;

fus; and I think it will appear, that, if what is, and must be, allowed concerning him be true, it was absolutely impossible that he should have been an impostor, every thing related of him being perfectly natural on the idea of his being conscious to himself, or fully persuaded in his own mind, of his having a divine mission, but in the highest degree unnatural, and even impossible, on the idea of his having been an impostor. That he was a mere *enthusiast*, and really imagined that he had a divine mission when he had none, is another question, which I shall consider only incidentally. This indeed was evidently impossible in such a case as this, and will not, I am persuaded, be supposed by any unbeliever; so that if Jesus was no impostor, and did not know that he was deceiving his followers and the world, his divine mission must be acknowledged.

1. If we consider the nature and extent of the undertaking of Jesus, it must appear highly improbable that it should  
have

have occurred to a person of his country, and of his low birth, and education. Had his views, whatever they were, extended no farther than his own country, is undertaking any thing that should bring him into notice, and advance him in life, (which is all that an impostor can be supposed to aim at) must have appeared very unlikely to succeed, and consequently must have been very unlikely to enter into his thoughts, and have been undertaken by him. With the Jews, the place of a man's birth was a circumstance of no small moment, and Jesus was of Nazareth, esteemed a mean place, in a despised part of the country, so that, on this account, he must have lain under great disadvantage; and his occupation, which was that of a carpenter, without any advantage of education, such as his country afforded, must have made his undertaking much more difficult. In these circumstances, ambition so preposterous as that of Jesus, must have bordered on insanity or infatuation, which must have appeared in his conduct.

conduct. But nothing of this kind *does* appear in him. Exclusive of the language suited to his undertaking, there was nothing like extravagance in his words or actions. On the contrary, his whole behaviour shewed a mind perfectly composed and rational, and what is more, there was not in him any thing of ostentation, but the most amiable humility and modesty, though accompanied with becoming dignity.

Whatever we may think of a Jewish education, and Jewish literature, they were highly valued by Jews, and must have been necessary to gain general esteem, especially with the higher classes of men, and for the purpose of acting any conspicuous part in that country. Jesus himself could not but have found, and have felt, this disadvantage; and if he had not been deterred by it from his undertaking, he must have had such an immoderate and absurd conceit of himself, as could not but have appeared in his general conduct, and must have exposed him to contempt. Such is always the case if any person in  
similar

similar circumstances with us attempt any thing above his sphere of life. It frequently happens that men of no education, and, even of low occupations, step out of their sphere, and become preachers, but they are seldom attended to, except by persons like themselves, and they generally appear ridiculous in the eyes of others. But such was not the case with Jesus. He was revered and dreaded, by the chief persons of his nation; and the contempt they sometimes expressed for him was either affected, or conceived before they had sufficient knowledge of him. The manner in which they at length proceeded against him, shews that they were most seriously alarmed, and thought their own credit and safety depended on their destroying him.

Some persons destitute of the advantages of birth and education, have great natural talents, which supply their place, and give them great influence. But Jesus does not appear to have had any advantage of this kind. Like Moses, he was neither

an orator, nor a warrior. He could, indeed, speak pertinently upon proper occasions, and he discovered great presence of mind in critical circumstances. But this is not very uncommon, and there was nothing in his manner of speaking to captivate an audience, by moving the passions. He never attempted any thing of the kind, and the admiration with which his discourses were heard, was excited not by any thing that we call *eloquence*, but by the importance of what he delivered, and his authoritative manner of speaking, which a consciousness of a divine mission naturally gave him. It is evident that he avoided as much as possible all occasions of drawing a crowd after him, and when, from the fame of his miracles, this was unavoidable, he always withdrew as soon, and as privately, as he could.

2. If we consider what it was that Jesus undertook, we shall find that it was of a nature least of all calculated to strike and captivate the Jews. All that we know of them, of their general character  
and

and views, make it evident that the only person likely to gain their favourable attention was one who would personate their *Messiah*, who was then expected to make his appearance, to deliver them from the state of subjection they were then under to the Romans, and to give them the empire of the world. Except Jesus himself, and his forerunner John the Baptist, no other person ever gained any considerable number of followers among the Jews, who did not flatter their ambition, by advancing that pretention, or in some other form erected the standard of liberty among them. But with these pretensions they never failed to gain many followers in that nation. Jesus, however, established a permanent interest in the affections of thousands of that country, all prepossessed with the idea of a temporal deliverer (at first, indeed, fondly hoping that *he* was the person) though he carefully disclaimed all such pretences. And what is more extraordinary, his disciples and followers in-

creased after his death, when every idea of that kind must have been given up.

By setting himself alike against the Pharisees and Sadducees, Jesus not only rendered himself obnoxious to all the higher orders of persons in the country, but must have been less likely to succeed even with the common people, by whom the Pharisees were held in the highest esteem. Indeed, it cannot be said that there was any class or description of persons to whom he paid court, or was at all studious to recommend himself. One of his discourses to the people was of such a nature, that all his audience left him, except the twelve apostles, and yet he was not concerned or discouraged by it; but, turning to the twelve, he calmly said, *Will ye also go away?* Of what kind, then, must have been the ambition of Jesus, which was equally independent of the favour of the great, and of that of the commonality? What could he have expected but universal contempt?

A Jew,

A Jew, whose object had been to draw attention as a prophet, would naturally have assumed the habit and manner of the antient prophets of that nation, which had in them much of austerity. And by this means John the Baptist, who did not pretend to work miracles, was highly and generally respected. But Jesus, though with that example before him, adopted a very different manner. He appears to have dressed, and to have lived, like other persons, without any peculiarity whatever. Whenever he was invited, he did not decline being present at entertainments, and his presence does not appear to have been at any time a check upon their innocent festivity. This was so much the case, that his enemies said of him, that he was *a gluttonous man and a winebibber*, as well as a *friend of publicans and sinners*.

Besides, that, in a civil respect, the appearance and pretensions of Jesus were ill adapted to favour any ambitious views, he taught nothing with respect to religion  
that

that was likely to recommend him to his countrymen. He did not pretend to teach any doctrine that was properly new, but his exposing of the absurd comments of the authorised expounders of the law of Moses, together with their personal vices, was certainly hazardous. The general object of his preaching was to inculcate the strictest and purest morality, such as is found in the antient prophets. But he drew the attention of his hearers in a more particular manner to *a future state*, much more than had been done by any of the prophets who had preceded him.

The doctrine of a resurrection was at that time the general belief of the Jewish nation, as it continues to be at this day. But what he asserted of himself being appointed to raise all the dead, and to judge the world, must have appeared in the highest degree extravagant, and revolting, without the most evident testimonials of a divine authority for such high pretensions. What could an impostor, who must have known that he had no authority for such a claim,

claim, if such an idea could have been entertained by him (which, however must be confessed to be very improbable) have expected, but that, on the first hearing of such pretensions, his audience would have turned from him with derision. His pretending to a kingdom, and a kingdom not of this world, but in another, after he should be dead, was also more likely to expose him to contempt, than to procure him respect. And this declaration was made by Jesus when he was before a court of judicature, expecting immediate death. That, notwithstanding these circumstances, Jesus did not appear an object of contempt, but attracted the most respectful attention, and had many disciples while living, and many more after he was dead, has surely in it something very extraordinary, and well deserving to be enquired into; great effects always implying great causes. All these circumstances certainly shew that Jesus was conscious to himself of having advantages sufficient to counterbalance all the disadvantages he lay under, and his  
success

success proves that he was really possessed of them.

3. Still more extraordinary was it that such a person as Jesus should have extended his views beyond his own country, as it is evident that he did when he directed his disciples *to profelyte and baptize all nations*, and when he foretold the universal spread of his religion, which, though inconsiderable in its rise, like a grain of mustard seed, or a small quantity of leaven, was destined to embrace the whole world. No other Jew, of any rank or character, had talked in this manner before; and considering the extreme contempt in which the Jews must have known that they were held by other nations, except by the few whom they had profelyted, any Jew must have known that a person of his nation undertaking any thing considerable, was likely to meet with the worst reception, and nothing more offensive, or more hazardous, could have been undertaken by any man.

The object of the religion of Jesus, was nothing less than to overturn all the  
established

established systems of religion then subsisting in the world, systems always most intimately connected with civil policy, and as such most vigilantly guarded by all the power of the respective states, and, as was then universally thought, with the greatest reason; it being taken for granted, that their temporal prosperity depended upon the observance of the rites transmitted to all nations by their remote ancestors. The philosophers, who despised these rites, never ventured to hint at the propriety, or the safety, of discontinuing them; and the few who incautiously spoke with disrespect of them were charged with atheism, and had been put to death, or banished. We may, and justly do, laugh at the religion of the Greeks and Romans, and that of the rest of the heathen world, as systems of the most wretched superstition; but they were serious things with themselves; and besides their reputed sacredness, and the general dread of a neglect of them, they mixed with all their habits of life.

In all antient nations all occasions of joy or sorrow, and almost every transaction of a civil nature, partook of their religion; but more especially was every season of festivity, to which they were most passionately attached, a religious act. Even the theatrical exhibitions of the Greeks and Romans, calculated to entertain persons of the most refined taste, as well as the festivals of Bacchus and Venus, which gratified the lewdest and most debauched of the vulgar, were equally in honour of their gods. Also all their most admired poems were with them, as with other nations, tinged with their religion; so that without a knowledge of their religion, it is not now possible to understand them. I cannot, indeed, give a just idea of the extreme difficulty of the undertaking to overturn the religion of the several states of antiquity, without entering into a detail of particulars, too long for any discourse. Only persons well acquainted with antiquity, will ever conceive it.

This

This being the case, to change the religion of a people was, in a manner, to make them over again. To subdue them by force of arms must have appeared much more easy. There is not, indeed, a single instance in all antient history, of a nation changing their religion from persuasion or example. It is what the greatest calamities, and the approach of extermination has not been able to effect. The case of the Jews is the only exception on record. For they were ever ready to adopt the religion of the neighbouring nations. But then their remote ancestors in Mesopotamia, according to Joshua, and themselves in Egypt, had been addicted to them. Though the Egyptians saw the inability of their gods to save them from a series of the greatest calamities, and though the Canaanites found that theirs could not prevent their expulsion from their country, and their almost extermination, both the Egyptians and the remains of the Canaanites, appear to have continued as much attached to their several religions

ligions as ever. They would rather suppose that their gods were angry with them, and had for that time deserted them, than imagine that they had not been *able* to defend them, or that the gods of other nations (whose power they never called in question) had in that particular prevailed over theirs. For no heathen nation in all antiquity excluded the agency of superior powers in any event, public or private. The events of battles, though most evidently depending on the conduct of the generals, and the valour of the combatants, were always ascribed to the secret interference of the gods.

The prophet Jeremiah, expresses in very emphatical language, the extraordinary case of the Israelites in revolting from their religion, Chap. ii. 10. *Pass over the isles of Chittim, and see, and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods; but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit.*

In those circumstances, such an undertaking as that of Jesus, of the magnitude of which it is not easy for us at this day to form an idea, must surely have appeared impossible to a Jewish carpenter. Or if, from ignorance, he had conceived such an idea, he, or his followers, would soon have found the impracticability of it, without divine aid. Jesus himself did not go beyond the bounds of his own country, but no sooner did the apostles begin to preach to other nations, and appeared to be something different from Jews (whose privileges and customs had been long tolerated, without any serious inconvenience arising from it) than they found, that if they persisted, it must be at the hazard of every thing dear to them in life, and of life itself. And with these difficulties the preachers of christianity actually struggled about three hundred years; when the whole system of heathenism, which had prevailed from time immemorial, in the whole extent of the Roman empire, having been gradually undermined, gave way

on the conversion of Constantine ; and from that time, nothing, as we may say, remained of it, but ruins, which also crumbled away and disappeared in about three hundred years more. And now nothing more remains of the worship of Jupiter and Juno, Apollo or Bacchus, than if it had never existed. These celebrated deities are gone into oblivion, together with Baal of the Canaanites, Isis and Orisis of the Egyptians, and Thor and Woden in Europe. It is only in history, and the books in which they are mentioned, that the memory of them, and of the horrid and abominable rites with which they were worshipped, is preserved. What could have accomplished so great a revolution, a revolution far more astonishing than any that has ever been effected by policy or by arms, but a power not less than divine, accompanying Jesus and the apostles ?

The revolution produced by Mahomet had nothing in it approaching to this. He did not question the divine origin of the

the

the Jewish or Christian religions. He only pretended that his own was derived from the same source, so that he had no occasion to work any miracles. Idolaters, indeed (who, however, do not appear to have been very numerous) he subdued by force, but Jews and Christians, unable to treat them in the same manner, he tolerated. When the Mahometan power was fully established, and the caliphs of Bagdat had long made the greatest figure of any princes in the Eastern world, and their subjects had attained a high degree of civilization, some Tartar nations emerging from barbarism, adopted their religion; as the Tartars who conquered China, adopted the institutions of the Chinese, and the Romans the literature and philosophy of the Greeks. In this there is nothing at all extraordinary. But the Greeks and Romans changed their religion for the Christian when they were the most learned and civilized, and the Jews, in their opinion, the most ignorant, and the most despised of all nations, and the preachers

ers of christianity were at first of the most illiterate of that despised nation. This is a fact that cannot be contradicted; and having no parallel in the history of mankind, is certainly deserving of particular attention.

3. With all these difficulties before him, from the nature of his undertaking, and the people whom he had to gain to his purpose, Jesus promised to his disciples nothing at all in this world, but only in another. On the contrary, he frequently apprized them, that if they adhered to him, they had nothing to expect in this life, but persecution; and many of them that violent death to which he himself was destined. This is a kind of conduct which must certainly be deemed in the highest degree preposterous; and unaccountable, in an impostor, who, whatever he gave out, could not have had a view to any thing but some advantage in this life. It must have been to sacrifice himself and his followers, for whom it is evident he had the greatest affection, for no advantage

tage

tage whatever, to himself or them, which is what any man must pronounce to be absolutely impossible.

That a great number of persons should deliberately abandon themselves to persecution and certain death, in order to establish a scheme which they conceived to be favourable to the happiness of mankind, is not to be admitted. That a single person should devote himself to present death, when immediate and great glory would certainly accrue to himself, and an ample recompence to his family, is possible, though examples of it are uncertain and rare. But that many persons should do this, when the prospect of fame to themselves, and of advantage to their families, was distant and uncertain, and when for the present, and an indefinite length of time, contempt would be joined to their other sufferings, is impossible while human nature is what we know it to be. Such conduct would be deemed to be nothing less than *insanity*; and that a number of persons should be insane in exactly the same way, and infect thou-

G g

fands

fands with the same species of the disorder, would be most miraculous.

That Jesus *did* expect a violent death for himself, and that he apprized his followers that many of them must expect the same, appears from the whole course of his history. It was not a thought that occurred to him only just before his death, and which he had not time to reflect upon; but it appears that it was what he had steadily in view, so as to have had an opportunity of considering it in all its terrors, and all its consequences, from the very beginning of his ministry, and what he in good time informed his disciples of. Some time before his last journey to Jerusalem, it is said, Matt. xvi. 21. *From that time began Jesus to shew to his disciples how that he must go up to Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.* This, as was natural, staggered his disciples, who at that time expected preferment in the kingdom which they believed he was about to erect, and Peter said unto him,  
*This*

*This be far from thee Lord.* But Jesus, so far from palliating the matter, and endeavouring to soften it, and reconcile their minds to it, replied, *Get thee behind me satan, thou art an offence unto me. For thou savourest not the things that are of God, but those that be of men;* and turning to his disciples, he said, *If any man will come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.* On another occasion he said, Matt. x. 38. *He that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.* On all proper occasions he clearly apprized his disciples that in this world they had nothing better to expect than the treatment that he himself met with. For when the sons of Zebedee, James and John, applied to him for the chief seats in his kingdom, he said, Matt. xx. 22. *Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I shall be baptised with?* And when they said, *we are able,* he said, *Ye shall indeed drink of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism*

*tism that I am baptized with.* When he foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, he said to the apostles, Matt. xxiv. 9. *Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you, and ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.* By way of encouragement to bear all this, he could only say, and this he did in his first public discourse from the mount, Matt. v. 10. *Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.*

What could any man expect from this mode of address, from which Jesus never varied, but that his hearers, who looked for nothing but worldly advantage (which at first was the case of the apostles themselves) finding that he had nothing of that kind to offer them, would turn from him with indignation and contempt. Disappointed in their fond prospects, what could have kept them with him but a firm persuasion

suasion that he had a divine mission, and therefore that it was their duty to follow him implicitly, confident that, in some way or other, of which they had no idea, they would in the end find their account in it. Notwithstanding his persisting in disclaiming all pretensions of a temporal nature, they did not abandon the expectations they had entertained; still flattering themselves that though he did not acquaint them with it, he would at a proper time assume kingly power. But when he was apprehended as a malefactor, which did not at all surprize or disconcert *him*, they *all forsook him and fled*; while he with a painful and ignominious death before his eyes, met his dreadful fate with the greatest composure, and went through the whole of the trying scene without giving the least suspicion that he wished to avoid it. Naturally indeed he did, and therefore he prayed that *the bitter cup might pass from him*. But he immediately added, *but not as I will, but as thou wilt*. Surely this behaviour was very unlike that of an impostor.

This

This was far from being the conduct of Mahomet. Besides promising his followers the enjoyment of every luxury of life, and especially that of women (free, as he frequently repeats it, from impurity,) he did not fail to hold out to them something worth fighting for in this world. Neither himself, nor any of his immediate followers, were voluntary martyrs to their religion.

As Jesus did not fail to apprise his followers of the dangers, and the inconvenience, to which their adherence to him would expose them, he did not conceal the great evils which would attend the propagation of his religion, though it would ultimately be in the highest degree beneficial to the world, and would finally prevail in it. *Think not, says he, Matt. x. 30, that I am come to send peace on earth. I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's foes shall be they of his own household,*

v. 21. *The brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child; and children shall rise up against their parents and cause them to be put to death, and ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.* Surely such discourses as this was not likely to recommend his religion, or invite followers.

4. An artful impostor, would probably have *secrets* and confidential friends, to whom he would intrust what he did not choose to communicate to others, though this is not necessary to every impostor. But Jesus had no secrets, nor does there appear to have been any persons to whom he communicated what he concealed from others. When his audience discovered great perverseness, and a disposition to cavil, he spake to them in parables, but he afterwards explained the meaning of them to his apostles, one of whom was Judas, who, as he betrayed him, would, no doubt, have divulged whatever he had known to his prejudice. In the general instructions which Jesus gave his apostles, he directed them to publish to the world every thing that

that they had heard from him without exception. Matt. x. 27. *What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in the light; and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye on the house tops.*

The only secret that Jesus had, was not his pretensions to a divine mission (for this he always openly asserted, and appealed to his miracles for the evidence of it) but to his being the Messiah, announced in the antient prophets. But this was only for fear of exciting an alarm which would have done no good, and at a proper time he declared this to all the apostles, and to Judas among them. After his resurrection and ascension, this was no secret to any person. He also avowed it in the most solemn manner at his trial before the high-priest.

5. Jesus discovered no anxiety about the evidence of his divine mission, which would have been natural to a person who had been conscious to himself that he was unable to produce any that was satisfactory. This anxiety appears through the whole of the

the Koran. Mahomet's assertion of his divine mission, of the chapters in the Koran being sent to him from heaven, his denunciations of the wrath of God, and of hell-fire to the unbelievers, are repeated without end, so as to be tiresome in the extreme. What he wanted in evidence he endeavoured to supply by confident assertions, and this, together with the success of the battles that he fought sufficiently answered his purpose. To these he appealed, and his followers, no doubt, thought that God would not give such success to a mere impostor.

On the contrary, Jesus never, of his own accord, said any thing about his mission, leaving it to those who saw his miracles to make the necessary inference from them. He contented himself with answering objections as they were made to him; and as his miracles were never questioned, he easily shewed the absurdity of every thing that was objected to them, especially that of his casting out demons by Beelzebub. With great dignity he observ-  
ed

ed, on one of these occasions, John x. 25. that *the works which his father gave him to do, bare witness of him*; and in answer to the clamorous demand of a sign from heaven, he referred them Matt. xii. 39. to the sign of the prophet Jonas, saying that as Jonas had been three days in the belly of a fish, he should remain so long in the state of the dead, and rise again on the third day; which it appears that his enemies well understood, by the precautions they took to prevent any imposition with respect to it.

How natural was this conduct on the supposition of Jesus having been conscious to himself that he had a commission from God, and that the evidence of it, which was constantly before the world, was sufficient to satisfy any unprejudiced person. Had he been conscious that his pretensions were destitute of any solid proof, he would naturally have made the most of any fallacious appearance of evidence that he could produce, as Mahomet did of his victory of Beder, and the excellence of the composition of the Koran.

6. The piety observable in the character of Jesus is alone a proof, to those who give due attention to the human character, that he was no impostor. That he was actuated by the genuine sentiments of piety, appeared in all his discourses, and the whole of his conduct. He not only always declared that *he came to do the will of God who sent him*, and (John xiv. 10.) that *the father within him did the works*, which evidenced his divine mission; but it is evident that, as the Psalmist said, *God was in all his thoughts*, and that to his will he was at all times resigned. It was, as we read, John iv. 34, *his meat and drink to do the will of him that sent him*. He was frequent and earnest in prayer, and taught his disciples to pray, to avoid ostentation in prayer, Matt. vi. 6. *to go into their closets, and shutting the doors, pray to their father, who, he said, saw in secret*. Such a reverence for God, and devotedness to his will, in life and in death, as Jesus discovered, is absolutely incompatible with false pretensions to a mission from him, whatever might be his object in the imposture. It must have appeared

to him as the extreme of arrogance and impiety, such as could not fail to draw after it the divine displeasure, and the heaviest judgments.

No person can read the New Testament, and imagine that Jesus was an atheist, or an unbeliever in a future state of righteous retribution. Indeed, it is not probable that there were any proper unbelievers among the Jews in his time. Even the Sadducees were believers in the being and moral government of God, and in the divine mission of Moses. But Jesus was not a Sadducee. He was, without all question, a sincere believer in the doctrine that he taught. And that he was such an enthusiast as to imagine that he had those supernatural communications to which he pretended without having them, is even more improbable than the supposition of his having been an impostor. If ever man was in his *right mind*, and knew what he was about, it was Jesus. All his discourses and actions discover the greatest calmness and composure, and favour nothing of extravagance, which so egregious an

an

an enthusiast could not always have concealed. All his discourses are perfectly rational, and his whole conduct was of a piece with them; so that, if he had no divine mission, he must have been not an *enthusiast*, who had imposed upon himself, but properly an *impostor*, who endeavoured to impose upon the world; and whether this supposition be at all tenable, let any person, at all acquainted with human nature, now judge.

Besides the piety of Jesus, he was evidently a man of great benevolence, and had a strong sentiment of friendship for his apostles and others. And it cannot be supposed that such a person would purposely deceive and mislead his countrymen and friends. Impostors have callous hearts. Intent upon their schemes, they are deaf to ever other consideration.

Jesus gave many proofs of the strongest and tenderest affection. When he came within sight of Jerusalem, he *wept over it*, in the prospect of the calamities that awaited it. He wept at the grave of Lazarus,

zarus, and his discourses to his apostles a little before his death discover the most amiable sympathy, and concern, without the least regard to his own approaching sufferings. He was only occupied with the idea of what they would feel when he was removed from them. We see nothing like this in the conduct of Mahomet.

Though Jesus affected no austerity, he was free from all sensual indulgence, which was by no means the case of Mahomet; and he certainly did not aim at temporal power, but resolutely declined several proposals of the multitude to make him a king. What, then, could an impostor, without ambition, or personal indulgence, aim at? Jesus, being a man, must have had some such objects as other men have; but there was nothing that other men most covet that his conduct was at all adapted to gain. He must, therefore, have had views of a higher nature. On any other hypothesis his conduct is absolutely unaccountable; but on the supposition of his being conscious of having a divine mission, and of a station  
of

of honour and power destined for him in a future world, all his discourses, and his whole conduct, are perfectly natural. *For the joy that was set before him* (Heb. xii. 2.) *he endured the cross, despising the shame* of that ignominious death; but that he should have done this without having had in view any thing that any other man ever thought worth pursuing, is not to be supposed of him, or of any man.

Let all these circumstances be duly considered, the obscure birth, and mean occupation of Jesus, in a distant and despised country, his high pretensions to be the Jewish Messiah, without any assumption of kingly power, universally deemed to be most essential to that character, his claim to a kingdom though not of this world, and to the power of raising the dead and judging the world, when he had nothing but the certain prospect of a violent death before him; his undertaking to overthrow all the religions of the heathen world, firmly attached as the several nations were to them, religions which had kept their  
ground

ground from time immemorial, notwithstanding a long period now boasted of as the most enlightened of any till the present ; when there had not been from the beginning of the world an example of any nation voluntarily changing their religion ; his holding out to his disciples nothing but persecution in this world, and happiness in another ; his having no secrets ; his discovering no anxiety about the evidences of his divine mission, joined with his calm good sense, his exalted piety, his general benevolence, and the strong affection he always shewed to his friends and followers ; let all these circumstances, I say, be considered and, without attending to his miracles, and his success, it must surely be thought impossible that this man could have been an impostor, and meant to deceive the world. This *internal* evidence added to the *external*, on which I have already enlarged, viz. from *miracles*, and *prophecy*, must be abundantly sufficient to satisfy any reasonable and candid inquirer, with respect to the truth of christianity, and of revealed religion in general.

## DISCOURSE XIII.

*The moral influence of Christian Principles.*

---

If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

JOHN. xiii. 17.

IN the Discourses which I have already delivered, on the subject of *the evidences of revealed religion*, I first endeavoured to shew the value of *religion in general*, then the superior value of *revealed religion*, compared with that which is called *natural*. After this I gave you a view of the state of the heathen world with respect to religion, and to philosophy also as connected with religion; and the great superiority of the system of Moses, which has been most objected to by unbelievers, in both those respects. I then proceeded to explain the direct, or *external*, evidence of the Jewish

and christian religions, from *miracles*, and from *prophecy*; and in the last place, as a part of the *internal* evidence, I shewed, from the circumstances of the history of Jesus, the impossibility of his having been an impostor.

Having thus finished the *argumentative* part of my undertaking, I now proceed to conclude the whole with some observations of a *practical* nature.

1. If revealed religion be *true*, it must be of great *importance*, and demand our closest attention. It may well, indeed, be presumed, that if the divine Being, the great author of universal nature, has interposed in so extraordinary a manner as has been represented, in a scheme commencing with our first parents, carried on through the dispensation of Moses, continued by Jesus Christ, and to be resumed at his second coming, the object must be something of the greatest importance to the duty and the happiness of man; and it cannot be without hazard to ourselves if we neglect, and reject it.

The

The most interesting article in the scheme of revelation is the doctrine of a *future state*. And surely, if there really be a future state for man, if it be of much longer continuance than the present, especially if it is to last for ever, and if our well being in that state will depend on our behaviour in this, it behoves us to pay much more attention to it, than to any thing in this short and transitory life. Did any person now living in this country certainly know that he must soon leave it, and go to another, for example to France, where he had the prospect of succeeding to a large estate, would he not be thinking of his voyage, and making preparations for it? Would he not be learning the French language, and endeavouring in every other way to provide for his enjoyment of life in that distant country? And would a man be commended for his prudence in this case, and blamed for superstition and folly in another case exactly similar to it? Or would you not think a man insane who should forget a journey he was upon, and

take up with his inn; and not think it reasonable that a man who believes he is travelling towards an eternal world, should have his attention fixed upon *it*, and make light of any inconvenience he met with in his way thither?

Surely, then, it becomes Christians, who profess themselves to be *pilgrims and strangers* here, and *citizens of heaven*, to be thinking of their proper country, and preparing for their remove to it.

Men of the world naturally say, *let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die*. This is the great burden of the song with all the heathen poets. But the Christian as naturally says with the apostle Paul, Phil. iv. 5. *Let your moderation be known unto all men, the Lord is at hand*.

To use one example more. If you knew that any particular child would die at a certain age, as at ten or twelve, you would adapt his education, and your whole treatment of him accordingly, and not trouble him with making him learn things which he would have no occasion for till he

he was a man. But hoping and expecting that your children will grow to man's estate, you reasonably endeavour to qualify them for it, and would be universally blamed if you did not.

Let us, then, believing that we are both for immortality, overlook the transitory enjoyments and pursuits of this uncertain life, and, instead of laying up (Matt. vi. 19) *treasures on earth, where moth and rust corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal*, lay up *treasures in heaven*, where none of these inconveniences happen, and *where our treasure is, there let our hearts be also*.

2. If a life of virtue will alone ensure our happiness hereafter, and vice our misery, it certainly follows, that virtue is our greatest good, and vice our greatest evil. Consequently, our principal endeavour through life, should be the improvement of our moral character, to restrain every propensity to the irregular indulgence of our appetites and passions, to cultivate every generous sentiment of equity and humanity to our fellow-creatures, and  
habitual

habitual piety to God. Every thing else should in reason be made subservient to this one great end of human life. To be rich, or to be poor, to be master, or to be servant, to be healthy or diseased, are mere trifles, and wholly insignificant, compared with acting our part in life well, whatever that part be, that of a king or of a beggar, because it is upon our acting the part assigned us *well*, and not at all upon the nature or comparative dignity of it, that our future well-being will depend.

3. In such a world as this, in which it has pleased divine providence, and, no doubt, with the greatest wisdom, to place us, a state of trial and of discipline, a state in which temptations to vice and excess of every kind are continually before us, constant vigilance, and the most strenuous exertion, are absolutely necessary. In youth the love of pleasure, in more advanced years objects of ambition and avarice, have strong charms for men; and the love of these things cannot be kept within

within due bounds without the most unre-mitted attention, till a habit of moderation and self government be acquired and confirmed. This habit once formed not only takes away all pain of restraint, but converts our duty into pleasure. But, then, such powerful habits as these, are not acquired without much reflection and exercise. Restraint of any kind (and all virtue, at first, is such) is necessarily painful, and therefore will not be submitted to without some strong counteracting principle, without a principle of submission to some *authority*, as that of a parent, of a magistrate, of conscience, or of God. This, as I shewed you, is the most certain and the most powerful of all, and it is no where so clearly ascertained as in revelation. There we learn in the most intelligible language, what it is that the Lord our God requires of us, in order to live and to die in his favour, so as to secure a happy immortality.

Do not deceive yourselves by imagining that this great prize, of *eternal life*, is to be attained without exertion and labour.

Ad-

Advantages far inferior to this are never secured without them; and can we expect that the greatest of all good, should be obtained so easily? Christianity is, no doubt, the same thing now that it was in the time of Christ and the apostles: and he said, (Matt. x. 37.) *He that loveth father or mother, son or daughter, wife or friend, more than me is not worthy of me, and he that taketh not up his cross and followeth me is not worthy of me.* The apostle Paul frequently compares the life of a Christian to a state of warfare, as when he exhorts Christians Tim. vi. 12. *to fight the good fight of faith,* and Eph. vi. 11. *to put on the whole armour of God.* He also compares it to a race, as when he says, 1 Cor. ix. 14. *so run that ye may obtain,* viz. what he calls (Phil. iii. 14.) *the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.* Now both the state of warfare, and the exercises of running and wrestling, as practised in the Grecian games, to which the apostle alludes, required great preparation before the contest, and great exertion in the course of it.

If

If we be christians in earnest, we must have the advantages of Christianity, and the prospect of its rewards in a future state, so much at heart, that we shall prefer them to every other consideration, to every thing in life, and to life itself. I do not say that they who cannot do this are no Christians, or are to be numbered with the *wicked*, and consigned to future punishment ; but they cannot have any just claim to those distinguished rewards of Christianity, which are promised to those who are said to have *overcome the world*, which implies a contending with great difficulties, and of whom it is said (Rev. iii. 21.) that *they shall sit down with Christ on his throne, as he also overcame, and is sat down with his father on his throne*. In the house of God the kingdom of heaven, there are *many mansions*, and the choicest are reserved for those who (Acts iv. 22) *through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God*. But as we do not content ourselves with low attainments in this world when higher are within our reach, let the same ambition animate

animate us with respect to things of still more value, in another world.

As there are all varieties of characters in men, and all gradations in every character, in this world, there will, no doubt, be a corresponding distribution of rewards and punishments in a future state, though in a general way of speaking, and in the scriptures, men are usually divided into two classes, the righteous and the wicked. For the Judge of all the earth will, no doubt, do that which is *right*; and if so, there must be as great a variety of situations in the future world, as there are of characters and deserts of men in this, though we may not be able to form any idea, or conjecture, in what manner this will, or can, be effected.

It may, indeed, be said, and with truth, that if we love virtue at all, so as to be justly intitled to the character of *virtuous and conscientious men*, we shall set no bounds to our love of it. For if, in any case, we give other objects and pursuits a preference to it, it is only in some cases,  
and

and not universally, that we are disposed to act the conscientious and upright part; whereas God requires that we should give him our whole hearts, we must (Matt. xxii. 37.) *love the Lord our God, with all the heart, with all the soul, and all the mind*, that is, we must be wholly devoted to his will, in doing and in suffering, in life and in death. The apostle James observes (chap. ii. 10.) *that he who keeps the whole law, but offends in one point, is guilty of all*. If there be any case in which a man wilfully and habitually offends, he certainly wants the proper *principle of obedience*, that is, a just respect for the divine authority, which would lead to an uniform and invariable regard to the laws of God. This is a proof that there is some vicious propensity, to which, in his mind, every thing else will give way; and that, had he had as strong a propensity to any other gratification or pursuit, he would have been equally regardless of the authority of God in that case also. For he only obeys the laws of God, and the dictates of conscience,

science, when he feels no strong temptation to transgress them.

In this case no person can properly be said to be *a servant of God*, or of *righteousness*, but only a slave to his own favourite appetite or passion. But we cannot serve God and mammon.

In the present state of things, such as we cannot doubt is the best for a state of trial and discipline, a theatre on which to form great and excellent characters, a proper Christian temper is necessarily a difficult attainment. To form a truly great character there must be many difficulties to struggle with, evils of all kinds, moral as well as natural. For how could the greater virtues of forbearance, doing good against evil, resignation, and trust in God, be formed, but in a world in which men should be exposed to injuries of every kind. Not only could not real virtue be *tried*, and consequently *known*, but it could not even be *formed*, or exist, in other circumstances. And surely the character in which the virtues above mentioned exist is greatly superior

superior to that of the generality of the world; who not comprehending its nature or value, will under-rate and despise it. With them what is commonly called a high spirit, and a promptness to revenge injuries, will be more admired and cultivated than a disposition to pity and befriend the injurious person, which will be reckoned tame, and despicable; though certainly it must appear, on a little consideration, that the latter is more truly magnanimous, implying a greater command of passion, and superior reflection. It is no less evident that it is this prevailing *spirit of the world* which fills private life with quarrels, and which, entering into courts, fills the world with wars, the source of unspeakable misery; whereas a truly Christian temper, a humble, meek, and benevolent disposition would make the intercourse of individuals, and of nations, the source of peace and of happiness.

It is, however, no small attainment to get above the censure and contempt of persons whose minds are in a lower and more degraded state than our own, when  
they

they are the great majority of the world we live in, and are likely to continue so. In this state of things great exertion of mind is requisite so far to overcome the world, as to possess our own minds in peace and joy. It can only be done by looking habitually towards a state in which a truer judgment of characters will be formed, and in which those who are really superior here will be advanced to that state of consideration and respect to which they are intitled.

The real difference between a merely nominal believer, and an unbeliever is very small, and of little consequence, compared to the difference between the merely nominal and the real Christian. What are the generality of Christians, in what are called christian countries? They are, in fact, persons who mind nothing but their business, or their pleasure, without giving any attention to the principles of christianity at all. It is by no means the subject of their daily thoughts, it supplies no motives to their actions, it contributes nothing to moderate

moderate their joys, or to alleviate their sorrows. It neither enables them to bear the troubles of life, nor does it give them any solid hope in death. Whereas the real Christian, as the apostle says, Rom. xii. 15. *rejoices as though he rejoiced not, and weeps as though he wept not, because the fashion of this world passeth away, and the Lord is at hand.* He is ever looking, Tit. ii. 13. *to that blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of the great God, and his Saviour Christ,* and has peace and joy in believing.

4. Christianity is less to be considered as a system of opinions, than a rule of life. But of what signification is a *rule*, if it be not be complied with? All the doctrines of christianity have for their object christian morals, which are no other than the well known duties of life; and the advantage we derive from this religion is that the principles of it assist us in maintaining that steady regard to the providence and moral government of God, and to a future state, which facilitates and ensures the practice of those duties; inspiring greater  
piety

piety towards God, greater benevolence to man, and that heavenly mindedness which raises the heart and affections above those mean and low pursuits which are the source of almost all vices. But christian principles not reflected upon, or attended to, cannot be accompanied with any advantage of this kind; and better, surely, were it to make no profession of any principles, than to live without a due regard to them. Better, therefore, were it for any person to be an unbeliever in christianity, than to be a Christian, and live as if he had not been one. He deprives himself of all apology or excuse, for his bad conduct. And it would, I fear, be happy for thousands of professing Christians, if they had been born and lived among heathens.

We cannot too much impress upon our minds, that religion of any kind, is only a *means* to a certain *end*, and that this end is good conduct in life. Consequently, if this end be not attained, we not only lose the advantage of the means, or instrument, of which we were possessed, but

but are chargeable with the guilt of such neglect, are guilty of an ungrateful contempt of the means that were afforded us for the greatest and best of purposes ; and can we expect that this will go unpunished ?

The guilt of *unbelief* does not consist in mere disbelieving. For *opinions* of any kind, as such, bear no relation to *criminality*, but in refusing to consider with due seriousness and impartiality the evidence of christianity that is laid before men ; that refusal arising from, and implying, some vicious prejudice, or improper bias. And if, in any particular case (and I doubt not there are such) this refusal does not arise from any vicious prejudice, there is nothing to blame in such refusal. If, for example, any person had no access to the scriptures, by which he might have had the means of better information, and he was required to believe, as what was contained in them, things that he found it absolutely impossible for him to believe, as that bread and wine were flesh and blood,

or any thing else that appeared to him equally impossible, he must of necessity either be an unbeliever, or give up all pretence to common sense.

No person, however, can be wholly innocent who does not weigh the difficulties of believing with those of unbelief. Whatever difficulties any person finds, or are thrown in his way, he should consider the general evidence of the great facts on which christianity is founded; and if that be sufficient, he may be satisfied that, though he cannot for the present account for some particular appearances, or representations, the difficulties occasioned by this circumstance cannot be insuperable; since all truths are consistent with one another. If it appear, from indisputable historical evidence, that Christ wrought real miracles, if he died, and rose from the dead, his religion is unquestionably from God, and then all the absurdities charged upon his doctrine must have arisen from some misconception, or misrepresentation, though we may not be able to trace it. But it is no uncommon thing for a difficulty which  
appears

appears insuperable to day, to be cleared up to-morrow, as we see in many cases.

The principles of christianity, however, may be, and no doubt are, of great use when they are not explicitly attended to. They have been the means of establishing such maxims and habits in parents, as are afterwards communicated to their posterity, more by the natural and silent operation of example, than by direct instruction; so that unbelievers, born of Christian parents, and living in a christian country, may be, in a manner, half Christians, without their knowing it. Also mere nominal Christians are, no doubt, often restrained from vices and irregularities forbidden by christianity, without their being aware that the restraint comes originally from that quarter; having acquired habits of decent and proper conduct, which operate mechanically, and without any explicit regard to christian principles, though originally derived from them.

There are also, all degrees of the influence of christian principles, from the

exalted character of Christ and the apostles, and many others in every age, who had no other object of attention, and all whose thoughts, sentiments, words, and actions, were under the constant influence of them, who lived as the apostle said, as if *constantly seeing things invisible*, Heb. xi. 27. *by faith and not by sight*, 2 Cor. v. 7. as if the great scenes of the future world were present to them; there is a great difference, I say, between such christians as these, and those of the lowest order, who may, indeed, have read the scriptures, or part of them, and who retain some knowledge of them, and who entertain no doubt of their truth, but in their general conduct they give no explicit attention to them. Nevertheless the knowledge they have acquired has left some favourable impressions on their minds, some latent fear of God, and respect to his providence, and a world to come, which prevents the commission of great crimes, and leads to an uniformly better conduct than they would otherwise have been capable of.

5. If we have any value for our religion, thinking it to be an useful institution, and wish well to our fellow creatures, to whom we are therefore *desirous* to recommend it, we should be particularly careful to exhibit it to proper advantage, in our own dispositions and conduct. It is to *this* that the generality of mankind, inattentive to reasoning, will look, and not unjustly. Our Saviour himself said of pretenders to prophecy, and of men in general, Matt. vii. 6. *By their fruits ye shall know them.* Indeed, as the only end of good principles is good practice, if the latter be not apparent, the former will not be inferred. On this account we must not confine our religion to our closets, but carry it with us into life, and in the business and bustle of it, discover that superior meekness, benevolence, and disinterestedness, which christian principles tend to inspire. We should, in all respects, shew a greater command of our passions, and a greater freedom from the influence of a love of sensual pleasure, of ambition, and avarice

avarice, and from all those vices which arise from an excessive love of the world, and the things of it, to which a regard to heaven and heavenly things, (on which alone our best affections ought to be set) naturally leads.

When this is done, but not before, the world in general will have an opportunity of perceiving the real effect of christian principles; and if they be not properly influenced by it, the blame will not be ours. There can be no doubt but that, though on some the fairest and most advantageous exhibition of christian conduct may have an unfavourable effect, since as our Saviour observed, there are those who (John. iii. 19.) *love darkness rather than light*, and that the *world*, which *loves its own* (xv. 9.) will hate his disciples *because they are not of the world*, this will be the case only with those whose hearts are greatly corrupted. On others the effect must be favourable. As he says, (Matt. v. 6.) that *when our light shines before men they would see the good works of his disciples, and glorify his father who is in*  
*heaven*

heaven. What he meant by *glorifying God*, we clearly see from his saying on another occasion (John xv. 8.) *then is my father glorified when ye bring forth much fruit*, that is, *fruits of righteousness*, which the apostle also says, (Phil. i. 11.) *are to the praise and glory of God*.

But, on the other hand, if, in the whole tenor of men's lives, there does not appear to be any difference between the Christian and the man of the world, how can those who have no other means of judging, or who will not have recourse to any other, suppose that there is any advantage in the principles of the one more than in those of the other? If the nominal Christian behave just like other men, if he puts as little restraint upon himself in indulgences of any kind; if he be as ambitious, as avaricious, and as revengeful, when provoked; if he appear to have no greater regard to God, or love to mankind; shewing itself, as it naturally will, in acts of kindness, generosity, and mercy; if the Christian appear to be in all respects, as  
much

much attached to the world, and the things of it, as other men are, they will naturally say, that all his pretences to a belief in a future world, a world prepared for the righteous only, are vain, when it is evident from his conduct, that this world has as full possession of his heart as it has of those of other men.

By this conduct, not becoming, and adorning, but disgracing, his profession, the nominal Christian incurs the *woe* pronounced by our Saviour, (Matt. xviii. 7.) *It must needs be that offences come, but woe to the man by whom they come.* By this means we not only lose the benefit of christian principles ourselves, but, by giving others an unfavourable opinion of christianity, we indispose them to the reception of it, and consequently deprive them of the benefit of it. Instead of being preachers of the gospel, as every Christian in some sense or other ought to be, and which every christian may be, at least by his example, a person who is only a nominal Christian, but a vicious man, is in fact a preacher of infidelity, and

and does every thing that is in his power to unchristianize the world. On this account there was great use in the strict discipline of the primitive church, which rejected all such persons from their communion. Vicious men were to them as *heathen men and publicans*. Being excluded from all connection with Christians, and being known to be so, the cause of christianity did not suffer by their misconduct\*.

It

\* It has been unfortunate for the cause of christianity, that ecclesiastical history, like the civil, is, in a great measure, an exhibition of vices, and of misery. For these things are always most prominent, and catch the attention of the generality of observers; while the beneficial effects of religious, as well as of civil institutions, are much less conspicuous. The meek, the humble, and the heavenly minded, though the benevolent among Christians, attract little attention, and therefore make no figure in the eye of an historian. Besides, in all cases, virtue is more common than vice; and on this account the latter attracts more attention. The former is like the gentle rain, or dew, which though it does infinite good, yet, because it is common, is not so much noticed, as the destructive storm or hurricane, which tears up every thing before it, and lays a whole country waste.

Wealth and power will corrupt the hearts of men. It cannot, therefore, be thought extraordinary, if this was the effect of wealth and power in the bishops of the greater sees, and it is the conduct of these men about which ecclesiastical

6 It will be enquired by what means the influence of the world can be counter-acted, or by what means a due attention to

ecclesiastical history is most conversant; while the poor, the humble, and laborious teachers of christianity, and their hearers in lower life, who were really influenced by its spirit, and laid themselves out to do good, hoping for no reward but in heaven, passed unnoticed.

Occasions, however, have frequently occurred, which drew out these men, and their principles, into public view. I mean seasons of persecution; and then it might be seen what the power of christian principles really is. And when it is considered what numbers of Christians have suffered for their religion, in the heathen, the Papal, and even protestant, persecutions, what torture many of them endured, and, what is much more trying, of how long continuance were the sufferings of many of them, in prisons and dungeons, where they lingered out their lives destitute of every comfort, when liberty, life, honour, and wealth, would have been the reward of a simple renunciation of their faith, it will be evident that there is in christianity something that has great power over the hearts and lives of men.

But the principal circumstance to be attended to in the histories of persecutions is not the greatness, or the duration of the sufferings of the martyrs, but the temper of mind with which they suffered; their piety, their patience, their meekness, their benevolence, their freedom from the spirit of revenge, and the good will which they shewed even to their enemies and persecutors. This is an attainment of a truly extraordinary nature, which it is in vain that we look for among the heathens. This is not the disposition with which the North American Indian bears his torture.

Should

to christian principles can be best secured. I answer, the principal means to effect this great purpose, and one that will naturally lead to every other, is a familiar acquaintance with the scriptures. The zealous christian will make these books his constant companions. With the pious Psalmist (Psalm i. 2.) *his delight will be in the law of the Lord, and in his law will he meditate day and night.*

Be assured that in reading the scriptures ever so often, you will always find something new and interesting. Many

Should persecution again arise, christian principles being the same that they ever were, would, I doubt not, produce as great and as extensive effects. But I am far from wishing for an experiment of this kind. We are directed not to court, but to shun persecution, if we can do it with integrity and honour, from which, however, we are never to swerve. And perhaps christian principles undergo a trial no less severe in prosperity than in adversity. It is commonly said, and with truth, that if adversity has slain its thousands, prosperity has slain its ten thousands. A season of persecution forces an attention to christian principles, and unites numbers in the same cause; but in prosperity we must of our own accord, and without any external impulse, give attention to christian principles; and this the obtrusion of worldly objects too often prevents.

difficulties

difficulties you will, no doubt, meet with, as may be expected in books of such great antiquity, written many of them in a language which is but imperfectly understood, and abounding with allusions to customs with which we in this part of the world are unacquainted, and, which being in many respects the reverse of ours, will of course appear unnatural. But new light is thrown upon things of this nature every day. Many difficulties are already cleared up in the most satisfactory manner, and in the mean time every thing of this nature may be safely neglected, or referred to farther consideration, especially if you read for the purpose of moral improvement, the greatest part of the Bible being perfectly intelligible to every capacity, and in the highest degree useful and edifying.

A familiar acquaintance with the scriptures will preserve upon the mind a lively sense of God and his moral government. It will continually bring into view, and give you an habit of contemplating, the great plan of providence, respecting the  
design

designs of God in the creation of man, and his ultimate destination. You will by this means have a clearer view of the divine wisdom and goodness in the government of the world, even in the most calamitous events, as in the corruption of true religion, as well as in the reformation of it. You will perceive signs of order in the present seemingly disordered state of things, and will rejoice in the prospect of the glorious completion of the scheme, in universal virtue and universal happiness. Such views of things as these, which will be perpetually suggested by the reading of the scriptures, have the greatest tendency to ennoble and enlarge the mind, to raise our thoughts and affections above the low pursuits which wholly occupy and distract the minds of the bulk of mankind, they will inspire a most delightful serenity in the midst of the cares and troubles of life, and impart *a joy which the world can neither give nor take away.*

By the frequent reading of the scriptures we shall be unavoidably led to the exercises of meditation, constant watchfulness

fulness, and prayer, and every other means of virtuous improvement, whatever has any tendency to repress what is vicious and defective, and promote what is most excellent in the human character.

The study of the scriptures, which contain the history of the transactions of God with men, and which furnish topics of discussion proper for the exercise of the greatest genius, is equally interesting to the lowest and the most improved of the human race. Sir Isaac Newton, whose reputation as a philosopher stands higher than that of any other man, devoted almost the whole of his time after he was turned forty (and he lived to the age of eighty-four) to theology; and from my personal knowledge I can say that some persons now living, and lately living in England, who had greatly distinguished themselves, in mathematical and philosophical pursuits, declared that, as they advanced in life, they had the most satisfaction in theological ones. Nor can this be thought extraordinary, when it is considered that  
these

these are subjects of infinitely more moment than any others to rational beings, born for immortality.

Let us then, my christian brethren, whatever be our situation or employment in life, whether our pursuits relate to agriculture, manufactures, commerce, natural philosophy, or any of the learned professions; though we should be employed in the more immediate service of the public, in any civil, or military capacity, let us not forget that we are *men* and *Christians*, and without neglecting the immediate and necessary business of this life, attend chiefly to what is of infinitely more importance, viz. our destination to *another*; and, accordingly be solicitous to act such a part, and to cultivate such habits, as will be our best preparation for it; that whenever we come to die, the great business of life may be done, and we may be like servants constantly looking for the return of their lord, that *when he shall return, and take an account of his servants, we may be found of him*, as the apostle says, 2 Pet. iii. 14. *without spot*

*spot and blameless, and not be ashamed before him at his coming: but at the great day, emphatically so called, before the consideration of which every thing else should vanish like a shadow, we may hear the joyful sentence, Matt. xxv. 21. well done good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your lord.*











