

A  
CATECHISM,  
ON THE  
EVIDENCES  
OF THE  
CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

FOR THE  
BENEFIT  
OF  
YOUNG PEOPLE.

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# P R E F A C E.

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**T**HE following CATECHISM was drawn up, under the impression, that it might be useful for the instruction of young people, after they have been taught the Shorter Catechism, used by the Presbyterian Church; that having some principles of the arguments, in support of the Divine original of the Christian Religion, fixed in their minds, their faith might not be easily shaken, by the reasonings, or the ridicule of its adversaries.

As little *new* can be reasonably expected, on a subject so much discussed by the ablest writers, so this may be, in a great measure, considered rather as a compilation than an original composition. Many of the originals, not being now distinctly recollected, they cannot be particularly noted.

The design required, that it should be as plain, and as short, as possible; and this was consulted, both in the text, and in the notes; though an increase of the latter might have rendered it more satisfactory.

It is addressed to such as are instructed, as all professing christians are, to believe, that there is *One GOD*, the Creator and Governor of the world; that there is a particular destiny for men, of which, by due improvement, every one is capable; and a future life, in which they are to live forever. Without the acknowledgment of these principles, all inquiries about Religion would be needless; and the firm belief of these will

natively lead to such conclusions, as, considering the present moral state of man, will point out the necessity of a Divine Revelation. Christians believe these principles, and as far as the rejectors of Revelation admit them, they may reason together. But as to such as deny the existence of GOD, or his governing providence; and who are capable of believing that the universe is eternal; that this world was the effect of accidental convulsions and explosions; that all intelligence is the result of matter, particularly organized by involuntary combinations; that man, and other animals were the production of the heat of the sun, upon vegetable substances; that individuals have no destination, or hereafter;—such as these are destitute of the first principles, which would qualify them to judge of the nature and uses of Religion. What such atheists may say, or write, against the Christian Religion, should be regarded, by believers, as of no consideration. They serve, however, for one purpose; that is, to exhibit, to the world, a striking proof of the weakness and folly of mere human reason, in matters of Religion; and may save the trouble of deducing examples thereof, from the dark ages of the world; for such a system of opinions must appear to every informed mind, to equal, in its extravagance, if not to exceed, the wildest theories of any of the ancient pagan philosophers.

In discoursing of the powers of human nature, and what they are capable of, it is proper to inquire, in what state that nature is to be considered. Christians believe that man was made *in the image of GOD*; a complex being, composed of body and spirit, not only endued with powers of knowing, reasoning, and freedom of choice, and action, &c. which may be called his *physical powers* and essential to his nature, as man; but also, supernaturally instructed in the means of life, the rudiments of science, and the knowledge of his moral relations and duties; and well disposed to the observation of them. But in the general question,

about the necessity of a Divine Revelation, the inquiry is not, what the powers of man, thus instructed and undepraved, might do? For there are many plain evidences of a great depravity having taken place. Nor may the inquiry be confined to what his natural powers, with the present improvements and advantages of experience, would do; though all this will not obviate the usefulness, nor the necessity of extraordinary Revelation. Christians ascribe these advantages and improvements principally to some originally Divine communications; while infidels suppose them to be the effects of the exercise and invention of the mere powers of human nature. It is therefore proper to attend to the consideration of man, as in a state of *mere nature*, and destitute of any communication with heaven, or any instruction, but such as the world, in which he was placed, might afford him. This is the view of human nature, which some of those, who spurn at supernatural Revelation, appear to have adopted; and all such, in order to be consistent, should regard it *in this light*: for if supernatural communication was, at any time, needful, and graciously given, it is not absurd, nor unreasonable to expect, that it should be again afforded, as the wisdom of Divine Providence may dictate, and the circumstances of the rational creature may require.

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## The necessity of a Supernatural Revelation, from---

1st. THE INSUFFICIENCY OF THE MERE UNASSISTED POWERS OF MAN, TO GUIDE HIM TO THE PERFECTION AND HAPPINESS OF WHICH HE IS CAPABLE.

*Question 1.* **W**HEREIN does the happiness of man consist? (1)

*Answer.* The happiness of man consists in the exercise of his powers, in the pursuit, and enjoyment of such objects, as are suitable to them, and worthy of them.

*Q. 2.* What are those powers of man, which are especially concerned, in determining his true happiness?

*A.* Reason and conscience are the powers concerned in governing man, as a moral agent, accountable to GOD; in regulating his principles and actions; approving them, as far as agreeable to the divine will; and, by these means, furnishing a happiness which is peculiar to rational beings.

*Q. 3. May not man be happy without the direction and approbation of reason and conscience ?*

A. Ignorant and depraved minds may enjoy a kind of happiness, in sensual gratification, regardless of the dictates of reason and conscience ; but such as have a just sense of the dignity of human nature, and their relation to GOD, cannot be happy without the direction and approbation of those noble powers.

*Q. 4. Can the highest perfection and happiness, which man is capable of, be attained in the present life ?*

A. The highest perfection and happiness, which man is capable of, is not attainable in the present life ; every attainment increases his desire and his capacity for further progress ; and this is an evidence, that he is capable of endless improvement, and formed for an endless life.

*Q. 5. What is that condition of man, which is most favourable to his true happiness, in the present life ?*

A. That condition of man, which is most favourable to his true happiness, in the present life, implies an improved state of mind, disposed to universal righteousness ; accepted of GOD, and encouraged with a hope of perfection in a future world.

*Q. 6. What are the means, especially necessary for man, in the attainment of his true happiness ?*

A. Brute animals appear to be guided by an infallible instinct, to the end, for which they were made ; but man, as a free and intelligent being, must be directed by light, (or knowledge) in order to the perfection and happiness of his nature.

*Q. 7. What is that light, which is necessary to direct us, in the attainment of our true happiness ?*

**A.** That light is necessary, to direct us in attaining our true happiness, which may afford us just conceptions of the being, perfections and government of GOD; of ourselves, as dependent, immortal and accountable creatures; of our relations and duties, and of the future state, in which we are to have our principal existence.

*Q. 8. Might not this necessary knowledge have been obtained, by the use of the natural powers of man, without any supernatural instruction?*

**A.** The mind of man is better fitted to imitate, than to invent; to receive, than to discover any useful knowledge; and if he had been left, at first, without any instruction, it is reasonable to think, that he must have perished, before he could know even the use of his own powers, or the means of supporting his own life. (2)

*Q. 9. Is not the acknowledgment of a creator, and our dependance upon him, so reasonable a deduction from the visible creation, that every man might easily discover these truths?*

**A.** The acknowledgment of a creator, and our dependance on him, is perfectly agreeable to reason, and what every mind should consent to, as soon as it is suggested; but that rude and uncultivated men, whose whole attention is confined to sensible objects, and the supply of bodily wants, should be disposed to inquire into the nature of things, and the doctrine of causes and effects, so as to draw such a conclusion, is not to be asserted, upon principles of reason or experience. (3)

*Q. 10. Might not reason and experience lead men to a just knowledge of religion, as well as improve them in learning and philosophy?*

**A.** Mankind could never have made any proficiency

in learning, or philosophy, had not some original principles been first discovered to them. If we suppose they could have continued in life, they must have been, as all savages are, entirely governed by animal appetites and passions, destitute of any disposition for speculative inquiry, and incapable of desiring any higher state of improvement, than the present. (4)

*Q. 11. Have we any reason to think, that GOD, the creator, would give any special instruction to man, in his early state ?*

*A. As GOD had endued man with excellent physical powers, and a capacity for happiness ; prepared the present world for his reception, and a future world for his eternal residence ; it is reasonable to think, that he would also give him that instruction, without which, he must have immediately perished, and all had been done in vain. (5)*

*Q. 12. What traces of an original revelation are observable in the history of mankind ?*

*A. The most ancient accounts, respecting man, represent him, as a reasoning and religious creature, and in some degree of improvement ; besides this, his actual continuance ; the early existence of articulate language ; general notions of the being of a GOD, and of a future state, with some forms of religion ; the observation of sacrifices ; the division of time into weeks, and the veneration for the seventh day, which obtained among the eastern nations ;—these are most rationally accounted for, on the supposition of some original divine instruction. (6)*

21. THE EXPERIENCE OF THE WORLD, WITH ALL ITS PREVIOUS ADVANTAGES.

*Q. 13. What influence has human learning and philosophy had on the moral and religious character of man?*

A. The learning of the world has never, of itself, contributed to improve the moral and religious character of man. The nations most eminent for learning and philosophy have been most absurd in their notions, and corrupt in their practice, of religion and morality.

*Q. 14. Have any, among the nations of the world, who were destitute of divine revelation, attained to just notions of GOD?*

A. Though men of all nations, in the world, have had some conceptions of an object of religious worship, and that, rather from tradition than from reason and experience; yet none, who have not been favoured with a direct system of revelation, have entertained such worthy notions of GOD, as could be the foundation of a rational worship and obedience.\* (7)

*Q. 15. What appears to have been the state of religion, in the heathen world?*

A. The religion of the heathen world was utterly inconsistent with that service which rational creatures should pay to the *one glorious and eternal spirit*; the common mythology, in every nation, respected a multitude of Deities, of different orders, who were worshipped, with a variety of absurd and superstitious rites and ceremonies.

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\* *All have been idolaters, "changing the truth of GOD into a lie, and worshipping and serving the Creature more than the Creator."* Rom. i. 25.

*Q. 16. What appears to have been the state of morality, in the heathen world?*

A. It appears that morality was not connected, at all, with the religion of the heathen world; and as it was taught by some of their wisest men, it was inconsistent, defective, disputable, and intirely destitute of authority to enforce obedience. \*

*Q. 17. Was the doctrine of a future state received among the heathen?*

A. The reality of a future state was believed by some, denied by others, and held as uncertain, by the greater part of the wisest men among the heathen; the common mythology taught it, but clouded with circumstances so absurd and fanciful, as to be unworthy of rational belief.

*Q. 18. What are we taught by the defective and corrupt state of religion and morality in the heathen world?*

A. The defective and corrupt state of religion and morality, in the heathen world, teacheth us, that unassisted human reason, having so greatly failed to direct men right, in matters of faith and duty, is not a competent guide, to lead us to the true perfection and happiness of our nature; and therefore, that a divine revelation should be regarded as an unspeakable blessing. (8)

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### 3d. THE CONSIDERATION OF MAN, AS SINFUL AND GUILTY.

*Q. 19. What effect will the consideration, that we are sinners, have on our inquiries about happiness?*

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\* See Leland's view of the state of morality in the heathen world.

A. The consideration, *that we are sinners*, must greatly embarrass the reasonings of men, and shew the necessity of divine revelation, to encourage a hope of happiness. An innocent creature would require the discovery of a rule of duty, and objects of pursuit and enjoyment; but a sinner, besides this, has to inquire, what he shall do to be saved?

Q. 20. *What is that salvation, which a sinful creature should seek to obtain?*

A. As a sinner is condemned, by the righteous law of GOD, the moral governor and judge of the world; so, nothing can save him from the effect of that condemnation, but *forgiveness*.

Q. 21. *May a guilty creature have any rational hope of forgiveness, without an express discovery of that mercy, from the lawgiver?*

A. As forgiveness is an act of grace and sovereignty, so it is impossible for any one, who is under condemnation, to know that the supreme judge will not execute, but remit his righteous sentence, without an express declaration from himself.

Q. 22. *May not the discoveries of goodness, forbearance, and long suffering, observable in the course of divine providence, encourage, in sinners, a hope of forgiveness?*

A. None are the fit subjects of forgiving grace, but true penitents; and this is an effect never produced by such speculative reasoning. The contrary is universally true; that "men despise the goodness and long-suffering of GOD;" and "because sentence against an evil work, is not speedily executed, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them, to do evil."

Q. 23. *Is repentance a sufficient ground to encourage, in sinners, a hope of forgiveness?*

A. As the law of GOD must be executed, that men may fear to offend, so no repentance, however sincere, can encourage a hope of forgiveness, without an express promise of that grace; and any such promise would destroy the use and end of the law, unless attended with some other provision, instead of the punishment of the offender, to support the dignity of government, and enforce obedience.

*Q. 24. Good men find, in themselves, a disposition to forgive offenders, which is accounted an evidence of goodness; may it not, much more, be expected from GOD, whose goodness is infinite?*

A. Forgiving goodness, in men, is a *duty* resulting from their common relation, as brethren, and subjects of the same laws; but, in GOD, it must be considered, as a sovereign *act of Grace*, in perfect consistence with the honor of his government; and therefore, nothing can encourage a sinner, in the hope of that benefit, but a divine revelation.

## The nature and evidence of a Divine Revelation.-----

Q. 25. *What is a divine revelation ?*

A. A divine revelation is a supernatural communication of some truth to man, either *immediately* by GOD himself, or *mediately* by the instrumentality of some of his creatures.

Q. 26. *With what disposition of mind should our inquiries, about a divine revelation, be conducted ?*

A. Our inquiries, about a divine revelation, should be conducted, with humility and meekness; with a sincere love of truth; with a mind free from prejudice against it, and well affected to the glory of GOD, and the true perfection and happiness of man. (9)

Q. 27. *Is a divine revelation possible ?*

A. A divine revelation is possible; because it implies no contradiction, to say, that GOD, who is almighty, can communicate knowledge to man, in such an extraordinary way, as well as by the use of his common faculties: that he can effectually convince the instruments he uses, that they are inspired; and furnish them with sufficient credentials, to convince others, that what they have delivered is a divine revelation.

Q. 28. *What are those credentials, which, being produced by one, who professes to have a divine commission, may be sufficient to convince others, that his authority is from GOD ?*

A. When a person, professing to have a divine com-

mission, teaches doctrines, which, for their purity, excellence, and importance, are worthy of GOD, and needful for man, and is, at the same time, supported by the evidence of miracles and prophecy, we have sufficient reason to believe, that his authority is from GOD.

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## EXTERNAL EVIDENCE.—

### MIRACLES.

Q. 29. *What is a miracle ?*

A. A miracle is an event produced, different from, or contrary to the common course of nature.

Q. 30. *Wherein does the force of the evidence of miracles, in favor of a divine revelation, consist ?*

A. As miracles are the work of GOD, and which no inferior power can perform, without his permission, so when they are wrought, in favour of a teacher, professing to be sent by him, they are to be regarded, as the testimony of GOD, who is infinitely holy and true, and will not permit his seal to be set to that which is false.

Q. 31. *Wherein appears the peculiar fitness of the evidence of miracles to prove the truth of a divine revelation ?*

A. The evidence of miracles is most suitable to support the truth of a divine revelation, because they are appeals to the senses and judgment of mankind, in cases, within the reach of common knowledge and observation, and so, afford an evidence, the most direct, plain, and easy to be understood, and most effectual to

convince men, of every description, of the truth of doctrines thus supported.

*Q. 32. What evidence may be sufficient to convince men of the reality of a miracle?*

A. To those, in whose presence the miracle is wrought, the testimony of their senses is sufficient means of conviction; with respect to others, the testimony of witnesses, duly qualified, ought to be depended on, in this, as in all other matters of fact.

*Q. 33. Is the testimony of our senses, and of credible witnesses, to be depended on in matters of fact?*

A. We must depend upon the testimony of our senses, and of credible witnesses, in all matters, which are the proper subjects of that testimony. To dispute this would be, to contradict our constitution, to reproach our maker, to destroy the source of all our knowledge, and render us inferior to the brutes.

*Q. 34. Are not reason and experience to be used, as our only guides, in the credit we are to give to the evidence of our senses, and of human testimony?*

A. It is our duty to use our reason and experience, to understand the true report of our senses, and the credibility and competency of witnesses; but not to dispute their authority, when these things are fully ascertained.

*Q. 35. Does the miraculous interposition of GOD, in giving divine revelations to man, render the exercise of reason, in these matters, needless?*

A. As all instruction must be addressed to us, as rational and free creatures, so it is still the office of reason, to judge of the meaning of a revelation given, and whether the evidence of it is divine testimony;

and when this is clear, to receive it, with full consent of mind.

*Q. 26. Is it not reasonable to expect, that, if a supernatural revelation is given to mankind, it should be so universal, as to be given to every individual, and that all should enjoy its special advantages ?*

A. That a supernatural revelation should be given to every man, and miracles wrought, in his presence, for his conviction, is an absurd and unreasonable expectation. It is an abundant evidence of the wisdom and goodness of GOD, and worthy of all acceptance by men, if it be given at such times and places and published in such a manner, as to be a standing light, and general benefit to the world, though all may not experience its direct and principal influence. (10)

*Q. 27. Is the mysterious nature of the doctrines revealed a sufficient objection against the credibility of a divine revelation ?*

A. As all the works of GOD are unsearchable to human faculties, so it may be reasonably expected, that, in a revealed religion, relating to the nature and operations of GOD, the invisible world, and the salvation of men, some mysterious things may appear, above the comprehension of the minds of men.

*Q. 28. Is the miraculous nature of the evidence of a divine revelation any objection to its credibility ?*

A. A miraculous attestation, when the subject is worthy of it, is, by no means, incredible ; seeing the power of GOD is competent to it : and it is that very kind of evidence which ought to be expected in such a case.

*Q. 29. Is common testimony sufficient to confirm the truth of a miracle, which is an extraordinary fact ?*

**A.** Though a miracle implies an exertion of divine power, in an unusual way ; yet it may be as plain, and intelligible a fact, as any that can come to pass, in the ordinary course of nature ; and so may be as proper a subject of testimony.

*Q. 40. Were the miraculous facts recorded, in the holy scriptures, of such a nature, as to admit of being proved by the testimony of credible witnesses ?*

**A.** The miraculous facts recorded, in the holy scriptures, were so plain and obvious to the common senses and judgment of every man, that they were as capable of proof, as any facts, which could be recorded in history. (11)

*Q. 41. How does it appear, that the miracles, recorded in scriptures, were not subject to the suspicion of fraud and imposture, as some other pretended miracles have justly been ?*

**A.** The miracles, recorded in the scriptures, were not subject to the suspicion of fraud and imposture ; as they were not the effects of experimental efforts, done in secret ; on doubtful cases : under the sanction of authority, in favour of established opinions ; or interested spectators ; but openly, unaffected by, and in support of doctrines, of high importance, yet opposed to all the prejudices and interests, prevailing at the time.

*Q. 42. If the miracles, recorded in the scriptures, were really wrought, why were not all, who saw them, and heard the report of them, convinced, so as to become believers ?*

**A.** Men do not always believe, according to reason and evidence ; passion and prejudice often resist the clearest light ; yet great multitudes disbelieve, and it does not appear, that the miraculous facts, recorded

in the scriptures, were in the early period of christianity, at all, denied, either by Jews, or Heathens. (12)

THE QUALIFICATION OF WITNESSES.

*Q. 43. What are the qualifications of witnesses, which may be sufficient for the conviction of those, who hear their report ?*

**A.** When a number of witnesses relate things, which are not, in their nature, incredible ; and plainly appear to be persons of integrity, of sound mind, competent to judge of what they relate, under no temptations to falsify, and are consistent in their narrative, all reasonable and candid men must believe their report.

*Q. 44. How does it appear, that the apostles, the witnesses of the life, the doctrines, and miracles of Jesus Christ, were thus qualified ?*

**A.** That the apostles of Jesus Christ were witnesses thus qualified appears, from the plainness and simplicity of their writings ; the consistence of their narrative ; the holiness of their lives ; the effects of the conviction of the truth, upon themselves ; and from the manner in which they supported their testimony.

*Q. 45. How does the plainness and simplicity of their writings support their claim to credibility ?*

**A.** The style and structure of their writings appear to be plain, easy and familiar ; agreeable to the nature of the subject ; and destitute of any appearance of affected ornament, artificial colouring, or cautious accuracy, which might betray a consciousness of imposture.

*Q. 46. How does the consistence of their narrative support their claim to credibility ?*

A. They do not all record the same things, nor in the same manner, which might excite a suspicion of collusion and deceit, but with such a variety, as might be expected from honest men, who had seen and heard what they testify ; and yet with so complete a harmony, in all important matters, as manifests them to be unexceptionable witnesses.

*Q. 47. How does the holiness of their lives support their claim to credibility ?*

A. As the doctrines they taught, and recorded, were pure and holy, so their lives were eminent examples of every virtue, and experience teaches, that men, of such a character, are incapable of deliberate falsehood.

*Q. 48. How is their credibility supported by the effect of the conviction of the truth upon themselves ?*

A. It is an evidence of sincerity, in them, and worthy of credit, that, having the best opportunity of knowing the truth or falsehood of the facts, they testified, they were induced by them, to change their opinions ; to renounce their prejudices ; to devote their whole life to the gospel ministry ; and to commit themselves to reproach, and labour, and death, which they suffered, with heroic fortitude, refusing any honour to themselves, and ascribing all to the glory of GOD.

*Q. 49. How does the manner, in which they supported their testimony, manifest them to be worthy of credit ?*

A. In publishing the history of Jesus Christ, and the doctrines of the gospel, they did not require an implicit faith in their own veracity ; but rested all

upon the miraculous powers, with which they were endued ; a claim, which instead of gaining them credit, must have exposed them to universal contempt, if it had not been effectually supported.

THE GENUINENESS OF THE SCRIPTURES OF THE  
NEW TESTAMENT.

*Q. 50. How does it appear, that the gospel history of the origin of the christian religion, is true ; and that there were such persons, as Jesus Christ and his apostles in the world, at the time therein mentioned ?*

**A.** The truth of the gospel history, in these matters, appears from the testimony of several writers, both christians and pagans, in, or near the same age of the world ; and of many others, in all succeeding ages ; from the great and increasing number of christians, in succession, from that till now ; and from the constant observation of christian rites, particularly, the christian sabbath, baptism and the Lord's supper. (13)

*Q. 51. How does the constant observation of the christian sabbath, baptism and the Lord's supper, support the truth of the gospel history ?*

**A.** The religious observation of the christian sabbath, baptism and the Lord's supper, by christians, from the beginning, as ordinances of Jesus Christ ; memorials of him ; and distinguishing characters of his religion, does evidently imply the truth of the gospel history, and can be accounted for upon no other ground.

*Q. 52. How does it appear, that the books of scripture, ascribed to the apostles, were really written by them ?*

**A.** The universal consent of all writers, who men-

tion the subject, ascribes the writings to the apostles. No other authors have been alledged; and the books, themselves, are, on every account, an extraordinary production, and point out those extraordinary men, as the authors of them. (14)

*Q. 53 How may we be satisfied, that these writings have been handed down to us free from alteration or corruption?*

**A.** The great number of copies and translations of them; quotations from them, references to them, and commentaries upon them; the high veneration of christians for them; the zeal of parties, and the care of providence, have always been sufficient securities for their purity, and guards against any material corruption. (15)

#### PROPHECY.

*Q. 54. Was the divine mission of Jesus Christ confirmed by any other evidence, but that of miracles?*

**A.** The divine mission of Jesus Christ was confirmed, not only by miracles, but by prophecy. (16)

*Q. 55. What is prophecy?*

**A.** Prophecy is the certain foretelling of future events.

*Q. 56. What is the use and intention of prophecy?*

**A.** Prophecies were often useful, for the encouragement of the faith and hope of those, to whom they were delivered; but the principal use and intention of prophecy was to be a preparation for the faith of those, who should be witnesses of their accomplishment.

*Q. 57. How is prophecy an evidence of divine interposition?*

A. As none but GOD can know the future actions of free agents, and the effects of that plan of providential government, established by himself, so the certain foretelling of events, depending on these, must be an evidence of divine interposition.

*Q. 58. How does it appear, that the truth of the gospel history is supported by the divine evidence of prophecy?*

A. That the truth of the gospel history is supported by the divine evidence of prophecy appears from this, that the principal subjects of it are the accomplishment of prophecies, delivered some hundred year's before, and preserved in the scriptures of the Old Testament.

*Q. 59. What reason have we to believe in the truth and authenticity of the scriptures of the Old Testament, which contain these prophecies?*

A. The whole nation of the Jews, with their singular constitution and government; their peculiar customs, rites, and religious solemnities, all observed, from the earliest period of their national existence, as founded upon, and memorials of the laws, and miraculous facts, therein recorded; these, together with the consideration of their present extraordinary condition in the world, are sufficient vouchers for the truth and authenticity of those scriptures.

*Q. 60. Does the fulfilment of prophecies, contained in the scriptures of the Old Testament, support the divine authority of those books?*

A. The existence of those books, of so ancient a date, and their containing prophecies relating to the establishment of the gospel dispensation, and to other

remarkable events, in the history of the world, which have, accordingly, been fulfilled, is an evidence of the divine authority of these books. (17)

*Q. 61. Do all the prophecies, which relate to Jesus Christ, and gospel subjects, apply to him, with equal plainness and certainty ?*

*A. Some of the prophecies, relating to Jesus Christ, are more obscure than others, but all, when compared together, and considered in their connexion, do evidently apply to him, and to no other ; a coincidence, which every man may judge of, while ever these authentic records remain. (18)*

*Q. 62. What effect had the ancient prophecies upon the acceptance and success of the gospel ?*

*A. The ancient prophecies prepared the minds of men for the reception of the gospel ; by means of these, thousands of Jews, who owned the authority of the prophets, believed ; and by means of these, all christians become convinced, that Jesus Christ is the true Messiah.*

*Q. 63. Does it not weaken the evidence of the prophecies, that many of them were so obscure, that they, to whom they were given, could not fully comprehend the meaning of them ?*

*A. The wisdom of prophecy requires, that they should be so obscure, that their accomplishment might not be prevented ; and that they should be so plain as to be easily understood, when compared with the event ; as in this, the force of the evidence principally consists.*

## THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE.

*Q. 64. Whence arises the internal evidence of the christian religion, whereby we may be led to believe in its divine original?*

**A.** The internal evidence of the christian religion arises from the consideration of the excellent character of its founder, and from the purity, perfection, and happy tendency of its subject matter; as a provision for the reformation and happiness of man, worthy of the wisdom and goodness of GOD, and accommodated to our rational nature, moral condition, and final destination. (19)

*Q. 65. What peculiar excellency appears in the character of Jesus Christ, the founder of the christian religion, to manifest its divine original?*

**A.** The peculiar excellence of the character of Jesus Christ, as he appeared among men, was manifested in the perfect holiness of his life; the dignity of his conduct, and the eminence of his wisdom, goodness, and power, far above the reach of mere human attainment, and perfectly answerable to the profession he made, that he was the special messenger of GOD, and founder of a spiritual and heavenly kingdom, foretold in the ancient prophecies.

*Q. 66. What view does the christian religion give of the nature and destination of man?*

**A.** The christian religion considers man, as a rational creature; accountable to GOD, as his lawgiver and judge; designed to live forever, in a future state, and who must be forever happy or miserable, according to that moral character, which is acquired by him, in this life.

*Q. 67. What view does the christian religion give of the present moral condition of man ?*

**A.** The christian religion represents the present moral condition of man, as depraved ; that he is guilty, and needs forgiveness ; that he is under the government of animal appetites and passions, living as a creature of this world only ; ignorant of, and unfit for a holy and eternal life in the future world.

*Q. 68. How is the gospel revelation accommodated to this state of human nature ?*

**A.** The gospel revelation is accommodated to this state of human nature, by the suitableness of the provision, which it makes for the reformation and happiness of creatures, in such a condition.

*Q. 69. What is that provision, which the gospel revelation makes for the reformation and happiness of man ?*

**A.** The provision which the gospel revelation makes for the reformation and happiness of man, is contained in the doctrines which it teaches, the laws and ordinances, which it prescribes, and the authority, by which it is enforced.

*Q. 70. What are the peculiar doctrines of the christian religion, which are adapted to the reformation and happiness of man ?*

**A.** The peculiar doctrines of the christian religion, which are adapted to the reformation and happiness of man, are such as, Redemption by the blood of Christ, for the forgiveness of sin ; the mediation of his name, giving access to GOD ; the promise of the holy spirit, to renew and sanctify the mind ; the assurance of the resurrection of the body, and eternal life,

as the gift of GOD, through Jesus Christ, to all that believe and obey him.

*Q. 71. How do these provisions conduce to the reformation and happiness of man?*

**A.** These provisions conduce to the reformation and happiness of man, as they lay a good foundation for freedom from the fears of guilt; for the exercise of filial confidence and piety toward GOD; for success in striving against the power of vicious habits and passions; and they furnish the most encouraging motive to virtue, an object of hope of infinite value, and productive of perpetual engagement, and virtuous activity, during our whole life.

*Q. 72. What are the laws and duties, which the christian religion enjoins?*

**A.** The christian religion enjoins the whole moral law, in its true extent and perfection, and especially inculcates such principles and virtues as are adapted to the reformation of sinful creatures, from their unhappy condition, to a holy and heavenly life, and enforcing all by sufficient authority. (20)

*Q. 73. What is that authority, which is most suitable to enforce the faith and practice of religion?*

**A.** The direct authority of GOD, whom all men consider as the author and the object of religion, is the only sufficient authority to enforce the faith and practice of a religion, designed for general use, effectually on the minds of men.

*Q. 74. How does it appear that such a system of religion, as christianity, might not have been the work of enlightened and uninspired men?*

**A.** Bad men, however enlightened, could not, from

their governing dispositions, be capable of compiling a system of religion of such a holy and heavenly tendency; and good men, considering the profession which it makes to be a divine revelation, could not be guilty of so great an imposture, if that profession were false.

*Q. 75. What is there in christianity, peculiar to the system itself, to shew that it could not be of man, but must be of GOD?*

A. Not only its perfect purity, and suitableness to answer the high and noble end proposed by it, but also the singular nature of its doctrines and precepts, so foreign to the experience of men, so far surpassing their invention and conceptions, and so very unlike the dictates of human wisdom, shews, that it could not be the contrivance of men.

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## THE EFFECTS, OF THE GOSPEL REVELATION.

*Q. 76. What evidence of the divine original of the christian religion arises from its effects on the hearts and lives of men?*

A. The experience of the power of religious truth, in purifying the heart and governing the life, is an evidence of consciousness of its divine original; and this has always been the most satisfying to the great body of christians, and essentially subservient to its continuance and success.

*Q. 77. Has the light of divine revelation had any good effects, on the civil state and condition of the world?*

A. As the light of divine revelation has given, to the world the most rational views of the nature and government of GOD, and of the dignity, duties and rights of man, thereby improving their sense of the standard of virtue and strengthening the power of conscience, it must have a great influence in meliorating the customs, laws and manners of human society. (21)

### THE SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL REVELATION.

Q. 78. *How does it appear, that christianity has had any remarkable success, in the world?*

A. The extraordinary success of christianity, in the world, appears, from the great number of converts to it, in Jerusalem, and through all Judea, immediately after the death of Jesus Christ; throughout all parts of the Roman empire, before the death of the Apostles; and its continuing ever since, to be the religion of the greatest part of the civilized world.

Q. 79. *Is mere success an evidence that a religion is from GOD?*

A. Mere success is not an evidence, that a religion is from GOD. As mankind, with all their depravity, are disposed to religion, such systems, as are grateful to the corrupt state of human nature, may be expected to prevail; and GOD permits them, *that such as are approved may be made manifest.*

Q. 80. *What are the peculiar circumstances which render the success of christianity a proof of its divine original?*

A. The weakness and unsuitness of the instruments employed in the propagation of the christian religion;

the extraordinary nature of the evidence whereby it was supported ; and the opposition it met with, from the prejudice, policy and superstition of the world, all contribute to shew that its success must have been from GOD.

*Q. 81. How does the consideration of the weakness, and unsuitness of the instruments, employed in the propagation of christianity, shew that its success must have been from GOD ?*

A. The persons, employed in the propagation of christianity, were of the lowest rank in life ; destitute of learning, power or any worldly influence ; and continued in a state of poverty, reproach and persecution, even unto death : and to suppose, that these, without divine aid, could be successful, in establishing such a religion, so far superior to all that ever had been done, or thought of, by the wisdom of men, is utterly incredible.

*Q. 82. How does the extraordinary nature of the evidence, whereby christianity was supported, manifest, that its success must be from GOD ?*

A. The first preachers of christianity, professed to support the divine character and mission of its author, and the truth of his religion, by the evidence of miraculous powers, and this circumstance, peculiar to them, would have immediately destroyed their credit, had not that profession been well supported, and the evidence acknowledged to be true. (22)

*Q. 83. How does the consideration of the opposition which christianity met with, from the prejudices, policy and superstition of the world, shew that its success must be from GOD ?*

A. Experience teaches, that these principles of opposition, are, in all cases, almost irresistible, and espe-

cially, when supported by the supreme powers, they must have effectually silenced the weak and humble preachers of the gospel, had not their ministry been attended with the demonstration of the spirit, and with power.

*Q. 84. Might not such a religion as christianity have obtained all its success, by mere human means, as well as mahometism, which has prevailed, in a great part of the world, for more than a thousand years?*

*A. The causes of the success of christianity, and that of mahometism, were so different, that no reasonings can be conclusive, from the case of the one to that of the other.*

*Q. 85. Wherein appears the difference between the cause of the success of christianity, and that of mahometism?*

*A. The principal causes of the success of christianity, were the credit given to the miraculous facts, on which it was founded, and its reforming power on the heart, and life; but mahometism, after having obtained sufficient force, through faction and intrigue, depended intirely on irresistible power, enforcing a religion, accommodated to the prejudices of the people, and gratifying to the sensualities of human nature. (23)*

# The Divine Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures.

Q. 86. *What is that authority, whereby we are to regard the holy scriptures as a rule of faith and manners ?*

A. The authority, whereby we are to regard the holy scriptures, as a rule of faith and manners, is their *divine inspiration*. \*

Q. 87. *What is divine inspiration ?*

A. Divine inspiration is a supernatural influence of the spirit of GOD, on the mind of a man, whereby he is made the recipient of some divine instruction; or the organ of communicating some divine oracle; or whereby his faculties are improved to a higher degree, than he could, at the time, and in his circumstances, have attained to, in an ordinary way.

Q. 88. *How may divine inspiration be distinguished, according to its influence and effect on the mind ?*

A. Divine inspiration, according to its influence and effect on the mind, may be distinguished into an inspiration, of *suggestion*, of *elevation* and of *superintendency*.

Q. 89. *What is meant by an inspiration of suggestion ?*

A. An inspiration of suggestion takes place, when, either, by impressions on the mind, or by articulate

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\* It was apprehended, that some thoughts, on the inspiration of the holy scriptures, might be useful. The following are the sentiments of Dr. Doddridge on that subject, thrown into this form.

sounds, or by visible representations, GOD communicates any thing immediately to his servants, or makes them the mere organs of declaring any divine message to others.

*Q. 90. Does it appear that any part of the holy scriptures were given, by such an inspiration of suggestion ?*

*A. All those parts of the holy scriptures, where the very words, express predictions, or messages are said to be dictated by GOD, are to be considered as given by an inspiration of suggestion.*

*Q. 91. Is it necessary to the intire credibility, and authority of the holy scriptures, to suppose that the whole must have been given, by such a high degree of inspiration, as that of suggestion ?*

*A. It is not necessary to the intire credibility and authority of the holy scriptures, to suppose that the whole was thus inspired, seeing the natural powers of men, assisted, according to the promise of GOD, might be sufficient to record the things, which they well knew ; and the great variety, in the style and method of the sacred writers, shews that it was so ordered.*

*Q. 92. What is meant by an inspiration of elevation ?*

*A. An inspiration of elevation takes place, when the faculties of the mind, though acting in a natural way, are raised to an extraordinary degree, and the performance is more sublime and elevated, than could be the effect of the mere natural genius of such writers.*

*Q. 93. What is meant by an inspiration of superintendency ?*

*A. An inspiration of superintendency takes place, when the writers, though left to the exercise of their*

own memory and judgment, and to the choice of their own words, style and method, are yet so under the influence of the spirit of GOD, as to be effectually secured from error, and defects, and that the record shall be true and complete.

*Q. 94. What reason have we to conclude, that GOD would so inspire the writers of the holy scriptures, as to give a faithful record of his revelations to the world?*

*A. As GOD was pleased to give a revelation for the instruction of mankind in all succeeding ages. so his wisdom and goodness required, that, as an essential part of the grand scheme, he should make this provision to preserve it from the weakness of human memory, and the corruptions of tradition, that it might be an infallible standard of truth, and a sufficient authority to guide us in all the concerns of religion.*

*Q. 95. How does it appear, that the holy scriptures were written under such an inspiration of superintendency, as effectually to secure them from error?*

*A. It was the promise of Jesus Christ, to his disciples, that he would send them the holy spirit, to bring all things to their remembrance, and lead them into all truth. The writers themselves asserted it, and proved it, by miracles, as the authority, by which they wrote; and all christians, ever since, regard their writings, as an inspired and infallible rule of faith and practice.*

## The reason, and consequence of rejecting the Gospel.

*Q. 96. What are the causes, why men are disposed to object against the gospel revelation?*

A. The principal causes, why men are disposed to object against the gospel revelation, are, a pride of heart, that disdains instruction; disaffection to the character and government of GOD; and opposition to the holy way of salvation, revealed in the gospel. Phil. x. 4.—John iii. 20.—Rom. viii. 7.

*Q. 97. What is to be expected, from the justice of GOD, by those, who reject the gospel of Jesus Christ?*

A. As rejecting the gospel of Jesus Christ is a sin, of the highest aggravation, despising the authority, the wisdom and goodness of GOD, and rejecting the only way of mercy, so they, who do so, must expect to be deprived of mercy, and punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the LORD, and from the glory of his power. John viii. 24.—Heb. ii. 3, 4. x. 28, 29.—2. Thes. i. 9.

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# N O T E S.

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## (I)

WHEN Happiness is assumed, as the end, for which man was made; which he is to pursue; and, with reference to which, he is to judge of the fitness, or the necessity of means; this is to be understood, as subservient to the glory of GOD, *the chief, and highest end of man*; and not, as implying, that the only end, which the Supreme Being could have, in the production of creatures, must be *their happiness*. This opinion has been embraced by some, perhaps, to save the Deity from, what they think to be, an imputation of selfishness, and to render him more amiable. Thus, happiness being made the standard, only such views of the divine character can be admitted, as are *absolutely* subservient to it. Holiness, justice and truth must give way to the supreme exercise of goodness and mercy. Sin will be considered, as a misfortune, rather than a crime; sinners the objects of pity, rather than of punishment; and the necessity of redemption, by a Saviour, will be removed, by the supposed obligation, which GOD is under to us, as he made us, to make us happy.

Such views of the Supreme end of man, as derogate from any of the moral perfections of GOD, cannot be

correct. Happiness is indeed the *high end* of man. It is to be acquired in a course of voluntary and rational improvement, under the administration of perfect laws. It must consist in moral rectitude, and moral approbation. All this is a part of the perfect plan of divine wisdom, and must be subservient to the *glory of GOD*. It is as agreeable to perfect rectitude, that the wicked should be miserable, as that the good should be happy, and it would be inconsistent with the true happiness of rational creatures, that it should be otherwise. A Supreme Being, indifferent to perfect rectitude, would be the object of horror, not of approbation and delight.

## (2)

IT has, by long experience, become so natural to us, to feel the connection which there is between our intellectual and active powers, and to be so conscious of ability and ease in judging and determining, about the information afforded by external objects, that we may be led into mistake, when forming an opinion of what these powers might do, if they were destitute of that experience. Let us strive to lay aside that prejudice, and consider, what such a creature, however complete his natural powers might be, could possibly do, for his preservation, or comfort, if left, in any part of this world, without any information. His mental faculties, being but *mere capacities*, would be incapable of exercise, without some materials first suggested to him. The information of his senses, the inlets of knowledge, about things without him, would be, through want of experience, unprofitable to him. Whatever sensations he might feel, from external objects, by seeing, hearing, &c. would be altogether unintelligible. He could form no conception of what these sensations were, whether they were without or within him, near or distant, parts of himself or of some

other things. Destitute of the instinct of the brutes, he could not distinguish what was good for food; and, a *perfect infant* on all subjects, a much longer experience, than his natural wants could permit, would be required to teach him the use of his powers of body or mind, and to provide for his preservation in life.

If it is supposed, that his situation might have been so ordered, in the world, by the special providence of his maker, that the means of life would have suggested themselves immediately and abundantly to his senses, without the necessity of discrimination; might we not, with as great propriety, suppose, agreeably to the scriptures, that an extraordinary providence would instruct his mind, fully, on all such necessary subjects? This would more effectually answer the end; be a greater evidence of divine goodness; make the rational creature, not only understand the happiness of life, but feel and enjoy the pleasure, arising from the exercise of grateful affections.

## (3)

SOME philosophers have thought, that we cannot have any idea of active power, or of the relation of cause and effect. It is indeed true, that there is something, in all nature, and its operations, which is concealed from our researches; yet it is designed to convey instruction to our minds; and much of it may be known. Whatever might have been the case, in this respect, if man had been left to mere nature, without any supernatural instruction, we have reason to think, that some such relation, might easily be suggested, by experience and observation, to minds, in a very low degree of improvement. They might be conscious, that they had power to produce some effects, themselves; and they would see effects produced, and operations and changes going on, which were independent of them, and beyond their power; this might easily

suggest the idea of some power and agency, as the cause of these changes: but it is not probable, that that agent would be conceived to be any thing like the idea which enlightened reason should teach us to have of GOD. They would not think of *one universal, creating and presiding cause, present every where, and at all times, producing all these operations and changes; the author of life and power, and of all good, to themselves, and to the universe.* This is an idea too grand and sublime for the conceptions of minds, in such a state, as is supposed. It is more reasonable to believe, that they would conceive all these operations to be the effects, either of vital energy in the things themselves, or of some invisible beings, superior to man, and present with these effects; and the consequence would be, that, as these beings were conceived to be beneficial or hurtful, they would become the objects of veneration, or of dread, and of religious respect and worship. Such would, most probably, be the conclusions of rude and uncultivated minds, if they would reason, at all, about causes and effects. And as an evidence, of the justness of this opinion, it may be observed, that the further we look back into the early history of the world, we find, that the most worthy and enlarged notions of GOD prevailed. Under the influence of some traditionary revelation (for reason establishes no general notions) the Chaldeans, Persians, Arabians, Egyptians, and most eastern nations, entertained, at first, the belief of ONE GOD, the creator and ruler of the universe, and their modes of worship had a great resemblance: but the tradition wearing out, or becoming corrupted by officious improvers, the nations sunk into the process of reasoning above mentioned; embraced a multitude of topical Deities, and worshipped the sun and moon, the host of heaven, Gods of hills and vallies, springs and rivers, and almost every thing in heaven and earth.

## (4)

MUCH labour and ingenuity have been employed, to describe the process, by which men might arise, gradually, from a *savage* state, to improvements and civilization; but theories of this kind have never been realized. That men, in many parts of the world, have sunk into such a state, as may be called *savage*, is well known; and there appears to be a tendency in sensual human nature to it, when destitute of preventing means. Many instances are known, of captives, who, after a few years residence with the savages, refused to leave them; and of some, who had been educated among christians, going voluntarily to live with them. But no example can be given, of any nations, or people, ever arising out of that state, merely by their own efforts, while there are many examples of unsuccessful endeavours used by others to reform them. The natives of America have been living here, from time immemorial; yet are, as a people, still in the same low stage of society; and notwithstanding their long intercourse with the Europeans, and with the American States; and the many attempts, that have been made to civilize them, it has been yet impossible to raise them above their ancient customs, or engage their attention to religion, laws and the arts of life. It is a joyful consideration, that from the report of the missionaries, sent among them, we hear, they are, at last, willing to open their ears to instruction.

## (5)

IT is very unreasonable to think, that man should have had a wise creator and not an instructor; or that, in his original constitution, he was not qualified for that life and rank, in the creation, of which he appears to be capable. This is the language of revelation.

“GOD made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions.” Such as deny this, seem to be *far* consistent, when they suppose him to have arisen out of the slime of the earth, by means of the heat of the sun.

## (6)

1. THE tradition, that the first age of the world was the *golden age*, was universal, among all the eastern nations. They referred the original founders of their nations to that period, as producing the wisest and best men. This was the early and prevailing belief. The notion, that the world was produced by chance, or by the necessary operations of universal matter; and, that mankind continued some thousand years a stupid, *dumb and brutish animal*, was of far later origin. It started with Epicurus, and among such as were *called philosophers*, and, to the honour of the world, it is truly said, that it has never got into any other heads, though it has been often revived, and even lately, by some men of great talents, as a favourite opinion among them.

2. ‘Articulate language’—To learn a language, of any extent, is a difficult and tedious undertaking; to invent one, must be exceedingly more so; and to such as had no example of any such thing, or traces to guide them, it would be utterly impossible. “We learn to speak (says Dr. Beatty, Elements of Moral Science, sect. 45) when our organs are most flexible, and our powers of imitation most active, and even then, it is no easy acquisition. It is the effect of constant practice, for some years—Were we never to attempt speech, till we are grown up, there is reason to think, that we should never learn to speak at all. And therefore, if there ever was a time, when all mankind were dumb (*mutum et turpe pecus*, as Epicurus taught) all mankind must, in the ordinary course of

things, have continued dumb, to this day. Speech could not be *necessary* to animals, who were supposed to have existed, for ages, without it; and among such animals, the invention of unnecessary and difficult arts, whereof they saw no example in the world around them, was not to be expected. And speech, if invented, at all, by them, must have been invented, either by dumb infants, who were incapable of invention, or by dumb men, who were incapable of speech. Mankind, therefore, must have spoken, in all ages—and if so, our first parents must have received this art, as well as some others, by inspiration.”

3. Homer and Hesiod mention the ‘SACRED SEVENTH DAY’—*ebdomon ieron hemar*.

(7)

IT is an undeniable truth, as certain, as the existence of the Jewish nation, that while all the surrounding world, far and near, was sunk in idolatry and polytheism, that people were instructed in the most just and venerable notions of the character and government of GOD. This is an extraordinary fact, in the history of mankind. That a nation, so long in slavery, should, in this respect, so far exceed their wise and flourishing neighbours; that Moses, their lawgiver, brought up at a superstitious and idolatrous court, could renounce all the principles of his education, and, in opposition to surrounding examples, contrive the plan of a religious commonwealth, so different from all the world; and a character of the Deity, the head of it, not only infinitely diverse from the Gods of the nations; but so correct, as to bear the test of the most enlightened reason, to the latest ages. The Deity was taught and worshipped, among them, as a spiritual being, self-existent, eternal, immutable, omniscient, almighty, infinitely wise, holy, just and

true, gracious and merciful, the creator, preserver and governor of all things—it is also difficult, we may say, impossible, to conceive and speak of him, in more sublime and apposite language, than is used, concerning him and his works, in many parts of their scriptures. It might be profitable for those, who may be in doubt, about the divine authority of these writings, and want satisfaction, to endeavor to account for this fact, without it.

## (8)

I. REASON, considered, as the *faculty of comparing and judging*, can do nothing, without some principles of knowledge, first received: as the *slave of passion and prejudice*, which darken the mind, it is very unfit to be the sole guide in moral and religious matters: as signifying *that degree of knowledge of the fitness of things, which every man, in fact, has*; it has always been deficient. How incapable it was, in its highest state of improvement, in other things, to direct men right in matters of religion, and to resist the force of habit and prejudice, appears in the examples of Aristotle, Socrates, Plato and Cicero, who, though some of the greatest reasoners the world has produced, yet complied with, and recommended the common religion of their times, with all its absurdities. And, finally, if we take an estimate of Reason, from the example of many of those, who now call themselves philosophers, its province seems to be, to *dispute almost every thing*, and to *embrace any thing*, however paradoxical it may be.

Knowledge is acquired with difficulty, but easily forgotten, or lost; so there is a tendency in the nature of man, to sink, rather than to rise; to corrupt, rather than to improve, in any moral or religious attainments. Experience and observation may teach us

this. In judging of the influence of reason, in these matters, we ought to consider its effects on the general body of mankind, and not as they may appear in a few among millions. We find, that the depravity and corruptions of men are sufficient to oppose the efficacy of all the light, that the world yet enjoys. Notwithstanding all the advantages of a long enjoyed revelation; free and general means of instruction, plans of education, preaching, writing, printing, whereby every subject is examined and explained, which tends to the discovery, enlargement and preservation of human knowledge; yet a great part of mankind is still in ignorance. Under all this shining light, the multitude are still following their animal appetites and passions, and living merely as creatures of this world, without regard to reason and virtue, or the motives of a future life. Still, the force and rigour of criminal laws are necessary in the best regulated societies; all the light of religion and philosophy has not been effectual to suppress the pride and ambition of man; to put a stop to the savage employment of war, and make them love one another, as brethren and friends. This is a strong evidence of the powerful opposition, which the governing principles of human nature make to the means of instruction; and suggests a very low idea of what the reason of men would do, if they were intirely left to their own inventions.

2. Some of the heathen philosophers delivered many excellent moral precepts: but these wise men were few; of a speculative turn; travelled for instruction; and there is reason to believe, that their information arose, originally, from a higher source, than mere human Reason. "We doubt not, but a body of wise maxims, and excellent moral precepts, might be formed, by putting together the best things, which the heathen legislators and philosophers have said. However, it cannot be denied, that these maxims and precepts are found, in their writings, accompanied with

error and uncertainty, not only with regard to those great truths, which are the only solid basis of virtue, the existence of GOD, his justice and providence, the liberty of man, &c. but even with regard to the most essential duties of morality. And it should not be a matter of surprize, that the ancient philosophers, in the midst of heathenish darkness, fell into these errors, when we see the moderns, although enlightened by the torch of revelation, calling in question, attacking these truths; and even whilst they are continually talking of morality and virtue, sapping their foundations. The pernicious opinions; the dangerous systems, by which they have dazzled and discredited this age, are the most convincing proof, that man wants another guide, besides philosophy, to lead him to virtue." Jews letters, p. 274.

## (9)

IN examining the evidences and doctrines of revelation, the success depends chiefly on the disposition of mind. Honest and sincere minds are open to conviction; prejudice is a bar against it. The revelation, given in the holy scriptures, has a claim to be treated with respect, and examined with candor. Common sense and experience shew, that the world has need of light on the principal and leading subjects of it. Some of the wisest of the heathen, desired it, longed for it, and thought, from their conceptions of the goodness of GOD, there was reason to expect it. Vast numbers of great and good men, in all ages, have received it, and rejoiced in it. Its profession and object are infinitely respectable; and the consequences of receiving or rejecting it may be eternally interesting. It may, therefore, appear reasonable to attend to it, with the dispositions of mind, here recommended. Such as do so, will find satisfaction. Such as come to it, like antagonists, to find objections, will, proba-

bly, be left to find them, or to think that they find them. “ Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved; GOD shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.” 2. Thef. ii. 10, 11.—Some may not relish this sentence, because it is *scripture*; but let their own experience guide them. Let them reflect, whether they have not found it an universal law, that error depraves the understanding, and vice corrupts the heart, more and more, till truth loses all its distinction, and virtue all its charms. Therefore, as we ought to shun every appearance of evil, so we should be serious, and in earnest, when we attend to what has the appearance of good.

## (10)

A REVELATION, universal, and common to every man, could not be considered as *supernatural*; and perpetual miracles, would also lose their nature and efficacy, derange the established laws of nature, and be destructive to the freedom and virtue of mankind. Such an universality would not be conformable to the wisdom of the providence of GOD, observable in the variety of his gifts, and the gradual perfection of his works, which contribute so much to the beauty and order of the system, and to the improvement and happiness of man. But our revelation is not destitute of such an universality, as is agreeable to reason, accommodated to the known order of providence, and strongly expressive of the wisdom and goodness of GOD. It is by *instruction* and *example* that mankind are improved and governed; and, according to the scriptures, provision was made for this to the whole world, by revelations to Adam, and to Noah, the two fathers of mankind. Afterwards, by Moses, was a more durable light set up for the world. A whole nation raised up, as a star in the east, possessing

the knowledge and worship of the living and true GOD, and communicating divine light to the surrounding nations, as they might be led to inquire and see and learn. They were distinct from other nations, yet conspicuous among them, and so contributed to disseminate the knowledge of religious principles, and especially to prepare the world for the reception of the *Gospel*; the rising of the Sun of Righteousness; the light of which is not stationary, as the former, but calculated to spread and shine to the ends of the earth. The commission of its author is, "Go ye into *all the world*, preach the gospel to *every creature*." If, therefore, it has not had universal effect, it is to be imputed more to the inactivity of its friends, or the opposition of its enemies, than to any defect in the wisdom of its provisions.

## ( I I )

THE miraculous passage of 600,000 Israelites through the Red sea, and the river Jordan; their preservation and supplies for forty years, in the wilderness of Arabia; and many other events of an extraordinary nature, of which they were witnesses, required nothing more than common sense and experience to satisfy every one of that number of the reality of those miracles. It is certain that they were firmly believed by the whole nation, and regarded, according to their law, as a grand motive of their gratitude and obedience. Yet it was impossible that such facts could have been believed, at first, or at any other time, if they had not been true. (Leslie's Short Method.)—The same observation may be made, with respect to the plainness, and familiar nature of the miracles ascribed to Jesus Christ and the Apostles, which rendered them a proper subject of testimony.

## (12)

THAT the leaders of the Jews, and the great body of the nation, who were directed by them, should be under very strong prejudice against the gospel, is not, at all, strange. In their opinion, it abrogated their law, which they knew to be divine. It deprived their nation and temple, of the honours, they had assumed. It stripped the officers of the hierarchy of their dignity and emoluments. It taught a religion, foreign to their sentiments and taste; it exhibited a Messiah, exceedingly different from their views, and cut off all their hopes of universal monarchy under their expected King. On these accounts, they were disposed to reject the gospel, and though the miracles of Christ and the apostles were not discredited, yet a belief in the operation of demons enabled them to slight the evidence of them.

As to the Gentiles, the gospel was foolishness to them, and unworthy of examination. The miracles were ascribed to magic. Great multitudes of the lower ranks, who were governed by common sense, did believe; but the more learned, who boasted of their philosophy, had such a contempt of it, as prevented all inquiry. This will not appear strange, when we find it so common, with such philosophers still, to take up their objections against revelation, from hand to hand, and even to write against the books of scripture, when they have never read them.

## (13)

SEVERAL heathen writers make mention of the christians and their religion, and of its author and his apostles; particularly Tacitus, Suetonius, Celsus, Hieroclus, Porphyry, Pliny, Lucian—The earliest chris-

tian writers, besides the apostles, were, Hermas, Clemens Romanus, Papias, Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin Martyr—Some of them were contemporary with the apostles, and some wrote apologies for christianity against its adversaries.

## (14)

WHETHER any writings of the apostles have been lost? is a question of no importance. All that Jesus taught, and his apostles preached, and wrote, was, doubtless useful; but our concern is about these writings, which we have, and which are sufficient for their end and design. These have been received, by the church of Christ, in all its states, and at all times, as the genuine writings of those, whose names they bear. They were held sacred, from the beginning, as the oracles of GOD, and after a solemn inquiry admitted into the canon of the holy scriptures, while others were rejected, as spurious. They were also considered, and referred to, as the authentic records of christianity, by Celsus, Porphyry and Julian, its violent enemies, and were held in so high veneration by christians, that they chose to commit themselves to the flames, rather than to deliver them up to their persecutors.

## (15)

THE Scriptures bear no marks of any material corruption. Christians, who understand them best, esteem them most, and are most concerned about them, have never had any uneasiness on that head. Many different readings of so large a book, as the Bible, might be expected, from so vast a number of copies as have been made of it, in so long a time. But experi-

ence shews, that where any of these different readings appear, they seldom affect the sense of any important passage; they generally take place in smaller matters, as in dates and numbers; and a careful comparison of copies, and translations, can easily fix the true reading, and render them intirely harmless.

## (16)

IT has always been the lot of the prophets and messengers of GOD to meet with reproach from the world. The office of the ancient prophets was commonly, to correct error, reprove vice, and to denounce judgments, which is always offensive to the pride of man, and sufficient to insure resentment against the minister. Hence it was, that few of them undertook the charge, but with great reluctance. They had commonly but little good to say of the *great*, and on account of the austerity of their lives, unfashionable manners, and the plainness and freedom, with which they treated all ranks, they were reproached as fools and madmen. Their later adversaries are willing to admit all this, and to invent much more, themselves. The symbolical instructions which the prophets received, and their typical manner of address, by significant actions, has afforded abundant matter for wit and ridicule. The ancient Jews, however, found no fault with this. It was well understood by them, as a lively manner of speaking to the senses of men, and common in all the east. Neither was it held contemptible, that their addresses and prophecies were delivered in a sublime and poetical style; and that the prophets were often employed in superintending schools, for instruction, in psalmody and other preparations for public worship; but on this account, their enemies, of our day, will have them to be no more than poets. Not that a poet is a disgraceful character, but that their compositions may be considered, as

fables, or, at best, but as works of imagination. Their prophecies pass with *these*, for a mere calculation of chances; the ancients had no such opinion. None, who read and understand the prophecies, and are acquainted with the history of the world, can embrace that opinion. Undeniable facts have been so convincing, even to some infidels themselves, that they have alledged, that the prophecies were forged after the event. The truth is, that the things objected against the prophets, were real excellencies, and the ridicule of their enemies arises from the mistake of figures, for facts, and parables, for real actions, and from an ignorance of the language and customs of the people.

## (17)

SOME remarkable events, in the history of the world, foretold by the Prophets, are—The destruction of Tyre, Ezek. xxvi. The fall of Babylon, Jer. l. li. The progress and victories of Alexander the great, Dan. xi. 3. 4—vii. 21. 22. The four great monarchies of the world, and the rise and fall of the Roman power, Dan. vii. The destruction of Jerusalem, Dan. ix. 26. The dispersion of the Jews, threatened, Deut. xxviii. 37. 64. 65. Ezek. xxii. 15.—v. 10. 12. 15.—Foretold, Hof. iii. 4. Dan. xii. 7. Amos ix. 9. &c.

## (18)

A few of the prophecies, relating to Jesus Christ, may be observed in the following places—Of his coming, Gen. iii. 15.—xlix. 10. His offices, Deut. xviii. 18. Psal. ii. 10.—cx. Jer. xxiii. 6. Zech. ix. 9. 12.—The time of his coming, Gen. xlix. 10.—Hag. ii. 7. Mal. iii. 1. Dan. ix. 24. His lineage and characters, Jer. xxiii. 5. Is. vii. 14.—ix. 6. &c.—xi. 1—10. His sufferings, Psal. xxii.—lxix. Is. xlix. 6.—liii.

passion,—and Dan. ix. 26. His benevolent works, If. xxxv. 5—10. His resurrection, Psal. cx. xvi. 10. The nature and extent of his kingdom, Mic. iv. 1—5. Dan. 2. 35.—vii. 13, 14, 27. &c.

## (19)

IT is difficult to sum up, in a sentence, or two, the various subjects, which contribute to the internal evidence, of the revelation, which GOD has given us.—The glorious and perfect character of GOD, by which he was known, in no part of the world, but among Jews and Christians. The spirituality of his worship, to which all external rites were to be subservient. The peculiar grandeur and sublimity of subject and sentiment, in some parts of the scriptures. The humbling view it gives of human nature, every where correcting the pride and vanity of man, and inculcating humility—The impartiality of its history, with respect to the failings of its best characters; and especially, the harmony, series of revelations, laws, prophecies and providences, carried on through a course of some thousands of years, and all centering in, or some way subservient to, the great object of the christ~~ian~~ system, the glory of GOD, in the redemption of sinners, and the reformation of the world, by Jesus Christ—These afford satisfactory evidence, that the whole must be the work of GOD.

## (20)

THE laws of Christ, which are peculiar to the gospel, or enforced especially by its authority, are *Love*, supreme to GOD; to our neighbour, as to ourselves; even to our enemies—*Faith* overcoming the world, resisting the Devil, purifying the heart; en-

gaging the soul to Christ, subjecting it to his instructions and authority, and realizing the promises of the gospel—Repentance, self-denial, mortification, heavenly-mindedness, patience, humility, meekness, peaceableness, forgiveness of injuries, &c.—Such is the nature of the doctrines and laws of christianity, clearly taught, in every part of the sacred record; exemplified perfectly in the life of its author, and in a great degree, in all his true followers. It is therefore astonishing, that any should be so ignorant, as to represent it, as a system of power and revenue, or not to distinguish it, from those corruptions, which it abhors and condemns—It would be unreasonable to expect a religion, which men could not counterfeit and corrupt. The more excellent and respectable a religion is, the more it will be burdened with hypocritical professors; it will be a more useful engine, in the hands of ambitious men; and capable of producing more mischief in the world, when it is perverted. Hence have arisen, the division, wars, and persecutions, so frequently, and ignorantly charged on christianity, by its enemies. The wisdom of Christ foretold, that *offences* must come, and *heresies* also, that they, who are approved, may be made manifest.

## ( 21 )

THERE is no truth in the assertion of the adversaries of christianity; that miracles were the common pretence of all that have attempted to set up a new religion; and of all sectaries. No example of the first can be given; except the case of the jewish and christian revelation. And, of the founders of sects, very few ever pretended to miracles; such as did, certainly and suddenly failed.

## (22)

WITH respect to the influence of christianity on the state of the world, it may be observed— that the Kingdom of Christ is not of this world; and the design of the christian religion is to reform the heart, and prepare the mind for a happy life in a future world. Those, on whom it is calculated to have the greatest effects, are of that class, who are not much regarded by the great and conspicuous of the earth. Its distinguishing virtues are not such, as please the taste, or attract the notice of the men of the world; and its meek and gentle voice is not heard amidst the noise of public concerns. Yet it has not been without many effects on the state of the world whenever it has been made known. By its influence on the public opinion, it has relieved the world from the absurdities of polytheism and idolatry, and banished many criminal and barbarous customs. It has begotten a general regard to conscience, and contributed to the perfection of human laws, to a just sense of honour, and gentleness of manners; and has had a most sensible effect in regulating and enforcing the duties of the common relations of life. It has been often observed, that, wherever it has been respected, it has mitigated the horrors of war, discouraged, or abolished slavery, and by regulating the laws of marriage, it has raised the female part of the human species, from the most ignoble bondage, to their proper and honourable station. But its best effects must be sought for, in the temper and manners of those, that sincerely believe and obey it, and if truth can have any tendency to goodness, and good principles any influence on the morals of mankind, no one, who understands it, need doubt, but that the general and cordial belief and obedience of it would banish disorder intirely from human affairs, and bring about, according to the prophecies of scripture, and the hope

of christians, universal righteousness, peace and happiness, in the world.

## (23)

MAHOMETISM may be considered, rather as a *corrupt composition* of judaism and christianity, than a distinct independent religion. The founder of it appears to have drawn his *principles* from these. He paid a high respect to Moses and Christ, and adapted his system to the corruptions of Jews and Christians, which prevailed at the time. This contributed to its acceptance and success, as well as the favorable encouragement it gave to sensual gratification. A religion of such a nature, enforced by a powerful conqueror, and that promised freedom, victory and plunder, in this world, and a paradise of sensual enjoyment, in the next, was well calculated to increase the power of its armies, and the number of its votaries, in a part of the world, prepared by ignorance and corruption, for such an adventure, and at a time, when it was the universal belief, that *success* was an infallible proof of the countenance of heaven.

F I N I S.