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Daniel Compton

LECTURES
ON THE
EVIDENCES

OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION,

DELIVERED TO THE SENIOR CLASS,
On Sundays, in the Afternoon, in the College of New Jersey.

BY THE REV. SAMUEL STANHOPE SMITH. D. D.
PRESIDENT OF THE COLLEGE.

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This, it is trusted, will be found to be, in some degree, characteristic of the work now offered to the public.

If we consider the state of moral and religious opinions in the fashionable circles of society, and the increasing tendency towards infidelity in the present age, arising out of the relaxation of our manners, the necessity will be obvious of some antidote to the poison continually administered to youth in their intercourse with the world. A manual containing the principal arguments in favour of revealed religion clearly conceived, and perspicuously arranged and expressed, if it be, at the same time, so concise as not to deter the young by the labour of a tedious investigation, so simple as to be easily comprehended, and so full as to satisfy their reason, may be attended with several important advantages. A support may be found in it always ready at hand, of the faith in which we have happily been educated, and an answer to the principal objections with which it is, by the half learned, and the licentious, continually assailed.

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LECTURES, &c.

LECTURE I.

Introduction. The necessity of Revelation.

THEOLOGY is the science of divine truth. It is employed in demonstrating the existence of a first, eternal cause of all things; in investigating his nature and perfections; and in examining those manifestations, whether natural or extraordinary, which he has made of his will to mankind, for the direction of their duty or the encouragement of their virtue. It is a science intended to instruct us in the relations which man sustains to his Creator, and to unfold to him his origin, his moral state, the destination of his being, his present duties, and immortal hopes. No branch of your studies, therefore, can be intrinsically of higher importance, or embrace in its details a wider compass.

Theology is divided into two great branches; natural, and revealed. Natural theology comprehends

whatever can be known of God, of his relations to the world, of his worship, and his laws, by the exercise merely of our own intellectual powers. On this division of the general subject it is not my design to enter at present; especially, as it is hereafter to claim your attention, and form one principal head in your course of philosophy. Revealed theology* is that knowledge of these important truths which is supposed to be immediately imparted, by divine inspiration, to holy men, whom God has been pleased to constitute his

* Theology is a term derived from the Greeks. It was early adopted in the writings of the primitive fathers of the christian church, but was used by them in a sense much more limited than that in which it is generally employed by modern writers.

The Greeks divided theology into three different kinds; the fabulous, the natural or rational, and the political. The fabulous theology is exhibited by the poets, who collected together in their verses all the popular fables concerning the origin, the powers, the peculiar characters and attributes, and the whole history of their gods. Of these Homer and Hesiod furnish us with the most complete example. The philosophers examined what reason and nature teach us concerning the existence and attributes of God, and his providence over the universe. The priests presided over the political or exterior and practical part of religion, as it was supposed to affect the safety and general interests of the state. Orpheus, Amphion, and perhaps others of the early Greek legislators and poets, seem, after the example of the Egyptian priests, to have united all the three characters in themselves.

organs to communicate it to the world. And every serious and reflecting man, who ever casts his view forward to his future existence, and who justly estimates the frailty of human reason, must be solicitous, one would think, to know whether God has made such a revelation to the world; and what lights he has afforded us to guide our infirm and dubious footsteps amidst the profound darkness of nature which surrounds us. A wise and good man will ardently desire to know God *his* father, and the father of the universe; even self-love will prompt him to inquire what probability there is of perpetuating the pleasures of existence; what hope remains to man beyond the grave, on which impenetrable clouds and darkness now seem to rest.

But, before we enter on the consideration of the *doctrines* of religion, it is necessary in the first place to display its *evidences*, that our faith may not be merely an enthusiastic and visionary confidence, but a rational offering to truth and reason.

These evidences will form the object of our present inquiry. And if I should propose to you little, or even nothing that is *new* on this subject, I hope to be able to comprise the general argument in favour of christianity, in such a narrow compass, and exhibit it in such an easy and perspicuous order,

that, while it shall carry with it present conviction, the mind may retain it with greater facility, and have on all occasions a ready answer to those multiplied and insidious, but often plausible, objections to the holy scriptures, which you will daily meet with when you enter the world, both from books and men, and very probably, from your own hearts. Father of mercies! fountain of light and truth! add to these humble efforts thy blessing, and my pious hope shall not be disappointed!

Before I proceed directly to exhibit the evidences on which our faith in the doctrines of revelation may rationally rest, I shall, in the first place, offer to you some considerations which afford a strong presumption of the necessity of some divine communication from heaven to instruct mankind in the knowledge of their duty, and of the hopes they may lawfully entertain from the divine mercy. For, if revelation be not necessary, and reason alone be sufficient to lead man to his Creator, and to furnish him with all the principles, the motives, and aids of duty which are necessary in his present state, any examination into the truth of christianity is manifestly superfluous. But, if we see evils reigning over the moral world, which reason and philosophy are unable to cure, our confidence in the benignity of our hea-

venly Father will naturally lead us to expect his interposition, in some extraordinary way, in behalf of his erring, and afflicted, though disobedient children.

The necessity of a revelation may be inferred from the extreme ignorance, and even the monstrous errors with regard to the being of God, and to the nature of the worship which he requires, as well as with regard to a future existence, which prevailed almost universally among mankind at the period of the birth of Christ; it may be inferred from the extreme and universal depravation of morals, which the lights of nature and the aids of reason had become utterly impotent to remedy: And, finally, it may be inferred from the incapacity of the unaided powers of the human mind, satisfactorily to determine, if mercy will, or can, in consistency with the justice of God, and the purity of the divine nature, be extended to the guilty.

At the period when christianity first appeared in the world, the principles even of natural religion had nearly perished from among men. Instead of those pure and sublime conceptions which every reasonable and dependent creature ought to entertain of the supreme and infinite Creator, they had degraded the objects of their worship below even the vilest and most profligate of their worshippers. "*The glory*

*of the incorruptible God they had changed into an image made like, not only to corruptible man, but to fourfooted beasts and creeping things. They deified all the passions, and served them with all the vices.**

The ideas which they framed, and the hopes which they conceived of a future state of existence, were so uncertain and obscure; and were at best, so gloomy and uncomfortable, as to afford little encouragement and support to the heart in those painful self-denials, and those arduous conflicts which it must often undergo in aspiring to an elevated pitch of virtue. As little were they calculated to soothe and console it at the approach of death, which, to them, was the loss of every enjoyment, and of every hope; and still less to elevate it above the mere pleasures of sense, and to prepare it hereafter for a spiritual and celestial state of being. Reason, indeed, in its highest improvements, however it may accumulate probabilities, can afford no secure expectation, of the immortality of the soul. But, in the hand of

* What were Saturn and Moloch, and Venus and Bacchus, but cruelty, and lust, and intemperance personified? And what were their altars, their temples, and their groves, but scenes of the grossest pollution, and often of the most horrid crimes? In many countries, and especially in India, in Egypt, and Syria, they deified the obscenest parts of the human body, and served these detestable idols with a correspondent worship.

vice, it is used rather as a weapon to destroy this precious hope; for, immortality can be desirable only to virtue. And when this hope is destroyed, the broadest encouragement is laid open to every sensual and criminal excess. For, if no higher and happier condition of being awaits the virtuous; if the vicious have no future retribution to apprehend, why should they impose any restraint upon their present pleasures? Can any maxim be more natural to the misjudging mass of mankind, the children of appetite and passion, than that of the degenerate disciples of Epicurus: *Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die?*

From these, and other causes connected with them, the depravation of morals had become extreme throughout all the nations of antiquity before the advent of the Messiah. They had long abandoned that simplicity of manners which reigned in the primitive ages; and which was, in part at least, to be ascribed to those just and noble sentiments of the deity which appear to have been entertained by the patriarchs of the old world. Sentiments which were probably the remains of an original revelation imparted by God to the father of the human race, and repeated to the second progenitor of mankind after the deluge, and by him communicated to the nations

which sprang from him. For, in proportion as men descended farther from this source, and the traces of this primitive tradition became obscure, and mixed with the errors and fables which time incorporated with it, we find the deepest ignorance and the grossest idolatry prevailing, together with a correspondent corruption of morals, which, in a course of ages, arrived, at length, to bid defiance to all restraint and all decency. The apostle Paul, in the first chapter of his epistle to the Romans,* has drawn a dark and melancholy picture of the moral state of the heathen world; and, addressing converted Romans and Greeks, he implicitly appeals for its verification to their own observation and experience. And some, even of their own writers, have given to us the same picture in colours hardly less dark.†

It may be asked, perhaps, if reason, prudently and diligently applied, might not have produced a reform of this general corruption. I answer without hesita-

* Rom. chap. 1. v. 24—31.

† No where, perhaps, can we find a portrait of the moral state of men given in deeper shades than that which Juvenal has drawn of the manners of Rome in his age. And though some allowance is to be made for the colourings of poetry, and especially of satire; yet satire must be drawn from real life, and present to us a strong resemblance of character, otherwise, it loses all its effect.

tion that this was an effect beyond its power. It cannot promulge its laws with sufficient *clearness and certainty*; and these laws are destitute of adequate *sanctions*. That it wants *certainty* is evident from the eternal doubts, disputes, and contradictions of its pretended lawgivers, the philosophers. It may be still more evident to those observers of human nature who have seen with what facility the heart is able to bias or tincture every moral dictate of the understanding when opposed to our self-love. But, in the next place, its laws are destitute of adequate *sanctions*. The sanctions of the law of reason and nature consist only in that *self-approbation* which springs from the *love of truth* and the *performance of our duty*, and those inward reproaches of conscience which follow an action which we feel and acknowledge to be wrong. But what is the love of *truth* or *duty* in a heart that is already corrupted? And how feeble are the *reproaches of conscience*, when not enforced by the belief that we are accountable to a supreme Judge, and by the expectation of a future state of retribution! Its faltering remonstrances are easily appeased by the flatteries of self-love, or stifled in the tumults of pleasure. No: a corrupt age, a degenerate world, never can be reformed by the influence of reason alone. Its lights are too

dubious and uncertain; its sanctions are too feeble. The mass of mankind are not capable of comprehending the one, nor of being rationally governed by the force of the other.

The masters of science among the Greeks, fully persuaded of this truth, never pretended to impart to *the people* any of their moral or theological systems; believing them incompetent to comprehend their first principles, and still more incapable of pursuing these principles, in a train of regular, but often complicated deductions, to their legitimate conclusions. Hopeless therefore of their reformation, they abandoned them to the powers of superstition, to practise its absurd, and often licentious rites, without attempting to instruct them. This it was that made Socrates say, as Plato has recorded the conversation, "You may resign all hope of reforming the manners of men, unless it please God to send some person to instruct you." And made Plato himself say, "Whatever is set right, in the present ill state of the world, can be done only by the interposition of God."* These maxims of these great philosophers imply that, though the people may be capable of receiving the most wise and excellent

* Plato's treatise concerning a republic; book vii.

principles of theology, or of morals, from *authority* which is supposed to be divine; yet, if they were to be wrought out by the efforts of their own understanding, or by the aid of merely human teachers, the moral state of the world must be irremediable. Blind and arrogant, or sceptical, must be the teachers; dull, and incapable of learning, or bewildered in the doubts of their masters, must be the scholars.

Such was the necessity, felt and acknowledged by the wisest men in the heathen world, of some revelation from heaven to instruct mankind in the knowledge of the truth, and to give it effectual operation on their hearts and lives. If the great body, even of the populace, seem now to be more susceptible of rational ideas on the subject of religion, than they were in that period of heathen antiquity which we have just passed under review; if they entertain sublimer and purer apprehensions of the divine nature, and of that spiritual worship which should be paid to the supreme Creator; and if we see the tone of public morals raised to a higher pitch, and regulated by a higher standard; if every where we behold that very populace, who were denounced by the philosophers as incapable of a rational system of religion, thinking more wisely and more justly on the transcendent subjects of the *divine nature*, of

human duty, and the *immortality of the soul*, than those philosophers themselves, are we not fairly entitled to ascribe these effects to the influence of our holy religion; since reason had before tried, in vain, her full force upon the human mind and the human character?

But, the impotence of reason to instruct and reform mankind, is not to be seen only, or even chiefly, in the ignorance and vices of the people. It is, perhaps, not less discernible in the errors, the follies, and corruptions of the philosophers themselves, who cultivated it with the greatest assiduity, and who boasted having carried it to its highest improvement. What do we find among them but eternal doubts and contradictions: opinions ever varying, and settled on no certain basis of truth; which were, therefore, found utterly incompetent to control the passions, or to regulate, in many instances, the conduct even of the professed disciples of reason? The lives of the philosophers, with few exceptions, were not less dissolute than those of the people whom they despised. And, on the real nature of religion, and the true principles of duty, the sage, as will be seen hereafter, was scarcely better informed than the peasant.

But, lest these reproaches should seem to be the result merely of the prejudices of religion, let me appeal to Cicero, the greatest of philosophers, as well as of orators, who denounces them in still stronger language: "Do you think, says he, that these precepts of morality had any influence, except in a very few instances, upon the men who speculated, wrote, and disputed concerning them? No: who is there of all the philosophers whose mind, life, and manners were conformed to the dictates of right reason? Which of them ever made his philosophy the law and rule of his life, and not merely an occasion of displaying his own ingenuity? Which of them has conformed himself to his own doctrines, or lived in obedience to his own precepts? On the contrary, many of them have been slaves to the vilest lusts, to pride, to avarice, and to other similar vices."*

Nor is this surprising to those who consider that the extreme refinements of reason, which arise from the natural ambition of human pride, to extend its authority beyond its proper sphere, always tend to dogmatical error in bold and ardent minds, or to the cold indifference of scepticism, in minds of an opposite character. What is really within the reach of

* Tusculan Questions; book ii.

human reason lies near the surface, and is obvious to a sincere and impartial love of truth. But when we would penetrate deeper into the causes and the nature of things, attempting to pass the limits prescribed to human intellect, we are immediately bewildered in error and doubt. Hence the existence of a Supreme and Intelligent Cause of the universe, which to a plain and honest mind seems an intuitive dictate of the understanding, has become doubtful, as soon as ingenious men have made it a subject of speculation. They have pretended to doubt of their own existence, of the existence of the universe, and the reality of their own sensations. At best, the most important principles of religion and morals are thrown out merely as subjects of ingenious disquisition, intended to exercise and display their wit. There existed accordingly, in the various schools of Greece, such diversity and contradiction of sentiment, such subtlety and refinement, and often such systematic scepticism, that their theological and moral principles, thrown into the general mass of the subtleties of science, about which they were accustomed to dispute, lost all authority over human conduct. In a short period after the introduction of philosophy, the greater part of its professors became both vicious in their lives, and

atheistical in their opinions. And these masters of science, instead of proving the reformers of the world, only hastened its corruption; and, by weakening or destroying the ideas of a Supreme Judge, and a future retribution, opened a wider door to the licentious indulgence of all the passions.

LECTURE II.

Proof of an original Revelation to man. Impotence of Reason.
Necessity of a new Revelation.

THE impotence of reason alone to accomplish the reformation of the world, in the midst of the darkness and corruption into which it was sunk, is manifest from this additional fact, that the longer men relied upon it, and committed themselves to the guidance solely of its lights; that is, the farther we descend in history from the beginning of time, the more absurd do we find the superstitions of the people, the more atheistical and impious the systems of the philosophers, and the more degenerate the morals of both. The purer theology of the first ages seems to have been the effect of an original revelation imparted by the Creator to the father of the human race. While its traditionary lights were preserved with any considerable degree of clearness, the moral and religious state of mankind were less deplorable. Many vestiges of a sincere and rational piety we trace in the primitive history of the differ-

ent nations. But, in proportion as these lights were extinguished, or the pride of philosophy disdained the aids of those few rays which, after the lapse of so many ages, still remained in some eastern countries; it was then the human mind, resting solely on itself, betrayed all its impotence. Of this, the Grecian sages who, in the flourishing ages of their republics, cultivated philosophy with the greatest zeal, will shortly afford us a striking, and instructive example.

But, in order to give greater force to the example, it will be necessary in the first place, to exhibit some evidence of the existence of such an original revelation, that, in it, we may discern a sufficient cause of the superior wisdom and purity of the theological and traditionary opinions of the earliest ages, above those of succeeding periods, when men had carried their researches in science to a much greater extent.

That the generations of the human race have not eternally succeeded one another on a globe that is itself eternal, but must have had a commencement in some one original pair at least, is a conclusion of the soundest philosophy, as well as of religion. If then, we should suppose the first man to have been created in the full maturity of all his powers, yet must

he have perished almost as soon as he existed, unless his Creator had been pleased to instruct him in the means of providing for his own subsistence, and of defending himself against the innumerable dangers of an unformed climate, and of a savage forest. Man, furnished with fewer instincts, and fewer natural means of procuring sustenance, or repelling the attacks of his enemies than other animals, is committed chiefly to the guidance of reason. But reason is a faculty which unfolds itself too slowly to have been of much use to him in such an emergency. Its ideas, the materials of reasoning, it must gain from experience. The talent of combining and comparing them, and of inferring consequences through a chain of premises, it must acquire by time, by exercise, and habit. With what astonishment must the first man have opened his eyes on the heavens and the earth, ignorant of the nature, and the uses of all things which he beheld, unless his heavenly father, from whom he had just received existence, had imparted to him such a knowledge of the objects around him as was necessary to his preservation and happiness. He would not have known even the purposes of his own limbs, or how to employ them to the necessary ends of his preservation. He would have been, in every thing, merely a grown infant. Is

it then consistent with the ideas which we naturally, and almost necessarily frame of, the wisdom and goodness of God, to suppose that he would leave his principal work in this world, in a state so wretched and helpless, to perish almost as soon as he had received existence; or to exist in a state more degraded and forlorn than that of the meanest animals. And, if it was worthy the benignity of our heavenly Father to provide for the safety and temporal comfort of his offspring by some extraordinary communication from himself; much more is it to be expected that he should teach him to know his Creator, and his duty, a knowledge which would so greatly ennoble his being; and that he should impart to him those immortal hopes which afford the best encouragement of duty, and the best support and consolation under the necessary evils of life. Thus alone could man be rendered worthy of his station in the scale of being; thus alone could the first man have been truly a father to his offspring, by instructing them how to fulfil their duties, and how to attain to virtuous happiness. Indeed, if he had been abandoned by his Creator in the very first stage of his existence, and left only like a more cunning brute, to gather his subsistence from the spontaneous and scanty fruits of the earth, unprovided with those

means of procuring it which brutes possess, I do not see how, continually urged as he must have been, by the most pressing necessities, groping for roots, or climbing for fruit, he could ever have arrived at that state of civilization and improvement in which we now behold him, or could ever have had leisure, and tranquillity of mind sufficient even to invent a single art, or to discover a single principle of science. No savage, in the most savage nation which now exists in the world, can present to us a perfect type of such a man. They all have some arts derived from education. But he must have been destitute of every artificial mean of assisting himself, or relieving the cruel wants of nature which pressed upon him with an urgency that could admit of no delay.* Nothing, indeed, appears to me more improbable than that man, the greatest and the best

* The nearest resemblance of such a man which has been seen in our age must have been the wild man caught in the forests of Germany, whom no address or skill could tame, or bring to the least relish of civilized life. Others have been found in certain forests of France; who have probably been lost in their early childhood. All of them appear to be equally wild, timid, and intractable. Pressed by incessant hunger, and the extreme difficulty of procuring subsistence, they seem to have no senses or cunning but for this object. And all their activity and natural faculties having been for so many years devoted to it alone, every power of reasoning and acquiring any liberal improvement,

work of God in this world, should thus, at the very commencement of his existence, have been cast forth as a wretched orphan by his heavenly Father; that man, who is capable, by a proper culture and education, of being raised to a middle grade between the brutal and angelic natures, should be left to sink below the level of the beasts of the field. On the contrary, no conclusion appears more reasonable than that this favourite child of heaven should have been fostered with peculiar care by his Creator; that he should have been instructed in all those arts requisite for his subsistence and comfort; and especially, that he should have been taught to know the Author of his being, his relations, and his duties to other beings, his origin, and his destination. Thus alone would existence have been a blessing to him, and he have been enabled to render himself beloved and venerable to his posterity. And thus would the

appears to be perfectly dormant and almost extinct through want of exercise, and the pressure of the constant miseries of their situation. Their whole aspect and manner is that of brutal stupidity, or melancholy insanity. Such is the wretched type of what the first man would have been, if he had been left in the beginning, by his Creator, without any communication from him. We are not to judge of such a being by those rational powers which appear in civilized man, or even in the inhabitants of the most savage region at present on the globe.

earliest civil associations of mankind, the elements of which were formed in his own family, be founded on the principles of civilization, of morality, and religion.

Conformably with these ideas, the primitive state of the most ancient nations, as far as we have been enabled, by the most authentic records of history to trace it, was civilized; possessing in no inconsiderable degree of improvement all the arts of agriculture, architecture, and social life.*

A circumstance which merits particular consideration on this subject is, that we find nearly the same traditions concerning the Deity, the origin of the world, the primitive state of man, his essential duties both in the temples, and in civil society, pervading all the ancient nations with whose history

* Savage life and manners seem to have arisen in the beginning, only from the migration of idle and impatient spirits from the bosom of society, in which industry and labour were requisite to procure a subsistence, into distant regions which, though uncultivated, were replenished with game. Here they would soon lose the remembrance of all the arts except such as were necessary at once for their subsistence and their sport. Of the extreme facility with which men descend from civilized to savage habits, and the extreme difficulty with which they return in a contrary direction, we have many examples within the limits, and in the vicinity of the United States.

we have had access to become acquainted, from China to Britain, and from the Danube to the Nile.* This is a fact easily explained on the principle already laid down, that all these nations have sprung from an original progenitor, civilized and enlightened by an immediate revelation from his Creator; but in no way to be rationally accounted for on the idea of man being primarily in a savage state, and gradually rising to science and philosophy merely by his own efforts. As these traditions do not contain *first truths*, *philosophical axioms*, which are obvious to all mankind, it is impossible, on that supposition, that such uniformity should have existed among them.† The ordinary traditions of different nations have a reference to historical events peculiar to their own early

* Such are the unity of the Deity; the creation of the world; the primitive innocence and happiness of man; his seduction by the principle of evil; his fall and the degeneracy of his nature; his consequent miseries, from the sterility of the earth and the disorders of the elements; the universal deluge; the preservation of one family; the distribution of the various countries of the world among its descendents; the worship of the Deity by sacrifices.

† Opinions which are not first principles, or immediately derived from them, depending on accident, on education, on the state and circumstances of different nations, on the caprice, or turn of thinking of individuals who possess authority or influence among them, must necessarily be almost infinitely diversified.

history; but these evidently have a relation to events common to all nations, and could have no other source than the primitive family of the race, from whom so many, and such various tribes have descended.*

These traditionary ideas of religion, for a long time, maintained a salutary influence over the minds of men. At length, however, corrupted by time, and overwhelmed under a mass of fables, the weakness of the human mind displayed itself in the monstrous errors, the gross superstitions, and enormous vices which soon sprung out of the dereliction of revealed religion. The infirmity of reason was seen not less in the schools of philosophy than in the cottages of the vulgar, when, despising tradition, it came to rely solely on itself. At the time that Greece began to emerge out of barbarism, her sages, having no system of their own, and no principles on which to proceed in their philosophical inquiries, usually travelled for information into the east, to Phenicia, to

* Mons. Bailly, in his letters to Voltaire, thinks to obviate this consequence by supposing the existence of some vast empire, anterior to the memory of history, which had extended its conquests or influence over all the east, and at length, left these traces of its opinions and customs among the nations which afterwards arose out of its wrecks. Such violent suppositions only serve to confirm the authenticity of the sacred history.

Egypt, to Chaldea, and India; countries which appear to have been civilized from the beginning of time, and to have preserved with more purity than others, the traditionary doctrines of the primary revelation. Here, receiving these doctrines in the colleges of the priests, where they were preserved with the greatest care, they delivered them, on their return, to their disciples, not as discoveries of reason, but as most credible traditions handed down from a wise and venerable antiquity. Hence the dogmas of the primitive schools of Greece bear a remarkable conformity with the inspired history of our ancient scriptures. But as Greece advanced in refinement, and in science, her sages, disdaining any longer to travel for knowledge, or to submit to what they esteemed the childish discipline of tradition, began to examine all things by their own reason, and to give free scope to the fictions of their own imagination. Then their schools teemed with every wild theory; then commenced the conflict of the most extravagant and contradictory opinions; then, from the bosom of this chaos, sprung forth every impious and immoral system; then was truth involved in universal doubt. For the few principles, therefore, of theological, and even moral truth, which, at any time, subsisted among them, they appear to have been more indebt-

ed to the remains of an original revelation, than to any native powers of reason. But when they came to commit themselves to the guidance of reason solely, then appeared all its error, its uncertainty, its blindness; and above all, its utter impotence to reform the general corruption of the world, both in religion, and in morals.

Inasmuch, then, as mankind, at the coming of Christ, had nearly lost the knowledge of the true God, and his worship; and, as their moral depravity had kept pace with their religious errors, and none of the ordinary powers of human reason were found competent to remedy evils so extreme, it seems consistent with all just ideas of the perfections of God, and conformable to our reasonable hopes in his wisdom, goodness, and compassion, that he should interpose, by some extraordinary communication of himself, to save religion from utterly perishing, and to recal men to virtue and order by the knowledge of divine truth. The lights of tradition which had been gradually growing more dim for ages, were now nearly extinguished under a mass of the most corrupt and shameful superstitions that ever oppressed the world, and degraded human nature. And the wisest sages, bewildered in eternal doubt, and beholding around them vices in the habits of mankind

which they knew not how to amend, and mysteries in the order of nature and of providence which they knew not how to unravel, began to despair of the cause of truth, and of the reformation of the world. What the simple and unaided powers of human understanding could not discern any adequate and certain means of effecting, has been accomplished by the luminous evidence, and the powerful influence of divine revelation. Doctrines, at least claiming to be derived from this source, have banished from the greater portion of the earth the gross idolatry in which the ancient nations were sunk; and raised the general morals of the world to a much higher and purer standard. No where do we now behold altars or consecrated groves, reared to such divinities as Moloch or Saturn, as Astartè, or the Cyprian Venus. Every where we find purer and sublimer ideas of the divine nature, and of that worship of the heart which ought to be paid to God. Christianity has extended a salutary influence even among many tribes of the human race who have not yet embraced her holy doctrines, and shed some rays of a divine light into the darkness which still rests upon the pagan nations, which we trust, will gradually increase, till at length the Sun of Righteousness shall illuminate the whole earth.

(1) The insufficiency of reason to correct the moral depravity of the world will appear with irresistible evidence to those who duly consider its defect of *certainty*, its defect of *authority*, and its defect of *motives*. Its defect of *certainty*. Reason can proceed but a small distance with any certainty, in investigating moral and divine truth, beyond those obvious, simple, and almost intuitive dictates of the mind which are common to all mankind. And, in a corrupted state of manners, experience demonstrates that even these plain and natural dictates may easily be brought into doubt by the sophistry of the heart, when they oppose its inclinations and pleasures. But if the principles and laws of duty, and of divine truth, were much more clear and precise than they are, still reason is wanting in the necessary authority to enforce them on the hearts of men, and give them effect in practice. This authority, in order to overcome the powerful temptations to sinful indulgence which are every moment acting with a dangerous influence on a heart already yielding to them, should be nothing less than the acknowledged command of the supreme Legislator and Judge of the universe which would preclude cavil and doubt, sanctioned by a power to which no resistance can be opposed, and directed by a justice which cannot be turned

aside from its sure and awful course. When a man is accountable only to himself, feeble indeed is the voice of conscience, or of reason on one side, when his self-love, or his passions plead on the other. And finally, the *motives* to virtue which reason has it in her power to propose, the rewards for its self-denials, the encouragements in its conflicts, the supports under its various trials and temptations, are weak and inefficient. Does she propose the pure pleasures of virtue? But in order to relish them, you must be already virtuous. Can their calm and innocent delights be set against the ardent and turbulent enjoyments of vice? Can reason demonstrate that virtue would be eventually its own reward even in this world? Yet, you arrive at this conclusion by such a tedious circuit, and it is incumbered by so many modifications and exceptions, that seldom can this refined speculation combat the force of a present and importunate passion. But if virtue is unfortunate, as it often is, if it must often forego interest, power, favour, in its adherence to duty; what reward is there to indemnify it for its sacrifices? What authority to overawe, and restrain it from yielding to the profitable temptation? No: the awful majesty of God, the apprehensions of his supreme judgment, the eternal retributions of virtue and of

vice in a future state of existence, which religion sets before the mind, will ever be found necessary, and are no more than sufficient to combat the corrupt influence of the heart, and of the world. The impotence of reason, therefore, to cure the infinite errors of the human mind, the idolatries, the superstitions, the vices of mankind, appears from every aspect in which the subject presents itself to our view, and justifies the conclusion we have inferred from it: the ne-cessity of a new revelation to restore to the earth the truth which it had lost, and to redeem it from evils which the ordinary powers of human reason had become unable to correct.

This conclusion is justified by another most important and interesting fact. Man is evidently a guilty being: he has violated the moral law of his nature, and incurred the righteous displeasure of his Creator, and the infliction of all the dreadful penalties with which the supreme lawgiver has thought it necessary to guard his law. These penalties, which are not arbitrary in their nature, but are the decrees of infinite wisdom and justice, do not depend merely on *the will* of the legislator, probably they do not depend even on infinite goodness, to inflict or dispense with them at its pleasure. Every attribute of the Deity is as necessary in its nature and its

claims as the divine existence. Eternal justice, therefore, cannot as far as we can judge, forego the punishment of guilt. This is the ardent and terrible dictate of a convinced conscience, not less than the calm and deliberate conclusion of reason. But, how shall the claims of infinite justice be reconciled with the claims of infinite mercy? How shall the inviolable justice of the law of eternal truth and holiness be satisfied, in consistency with the forgiveness and salvation of the sinner? In what way may a sinful mortal reasonably hope to approach his offended Maker? How shall the heirs of death regain eternal life? These are inquiries to which the weakness of human understanding can return no satisfactory answer; and the dying sinner, under the guidance of reason only, must be overwhelmed with the most distressing perplexities and doubts, or abandoned to the most horrible despair. These are doubts which God only can resolve; fears which the spirit of inspiration only can calm, by drawing aside the deep veil which conceals eternity from our view, and exhibiting to our faith a complete oblation for the sins of the world. Here we behold new proofs of the necessity of a divine revelation, new causes to invite, and justify the interposition of our heavenly Father, in behalf of his miserable, though offending children.

And is not the gospel such a remedy as we need-
ed, such a revelation as is calculated to solve all
the doubts, and tranquillize all the apprehensions of
penitent guilt? In it you behold the divine justice,
and the divine mercy harmoniously combined. In it
you behold the divine law *magnified and made
honourable*, by an all-availing atonement for the of-
fences of the whole world. In it you behold *life and
immortality brought to light*, and a glorious channel
opened in which the boundless current of divine
mercy can freely flow to mankind. Where reason
and philosophy were silent, or constrained to confess
their impotence, we behold revelation announcing
her glad tidings, and triumphing in the happiness of
her children, and of the world.

LECTURE III.

Evidences of Revelation. Necessity of Miracles. Mr. Hume's celebrated Objection to Miracles.

IF the necessity of some interposition by heaven, in order to recal mankind from the monstrous errors of idolatry, to make known to them the perfect law of their duty, and to enforce it by adequate sanctions, is so evident, as has been shown in the preceding lectures, this necessity affords a presumption in favour of revelation. And if any revelation be admitted to be either necessary or probable, no doubt can be entertained of the superior claims of christianity above every pretence which has ever been set in opposition to it. This is admitted by its enemies themselves; and must be admitted by every candid and reflecting inquirer who considers the purity of its doctrines, the spirituality of its worship, the simplicity and excellence of the principle which it lays at the foundation of its moral system,* its tendency to universal happiness, the grandeur of the prospects which it opens into the eternal world, and the sub-

* The love of God and the love of man.

lime conceptions which it every where imparts of the divine nature.

But the truth of christianity does not rest on the *absolute perfection* of its doctrines, of which the frailty of human reason is very incompetent to judge; nor on our conclusions concerning what ought reasonably to be expected of the infinite benignity and goodness of our heavenly Father, in behalf of his erring and miserable creatures: conclusions in which we often depart widely from the actual rule of the divine government; but it rests on such evidences as every man of a sound mind who honestly applies his understanding to the subject, is capable to judge of; evidences which propose themselves directly to the senses, or arise out of the known and immutable laws of human nature.

Accordingly, they may be arranged under two heads: the positive and direct, which are addressed immediately to the senses; and the collateral, or presumptive, which arise out of a just consideration of the laws of human nature relatively to this subject. Of the former kind are miracles and the fulfilment of prophecy. Of the latter, are those conclusions which are justly drawn from the excellence and peculiarity of character of the author of christianity, from the humility of the instruments employed to

promulgate the gospel to mankind, compared with the sublimity and perfection of the doctrines which they preached; from its rapid and extensive progress, and the important moral changes which it has produced in the world; and from many other similar facts which cannot be satisfactorily accounted for on the ordinary principles of human nature, or of human action; and which, therefore, imply a divine agency and direction. The former, when fairly attended to, do, in each particular case, carry with them entire conviction of the immediate interposition of God; for none but God can operate a miracle, or foretell with minute accuracy, future and distant events. The latter though, singly taken, they do not amount to absolute proof, yet collectively, produce the highest degree of probability.

By certain writers every pretence to miracles becomes immediately suspected, and is deemed a sufficient reason for not entering farther into an examination of the evidences of revelation. This is, in effect, declaring it to be impossible for God to communicate himself by any revelation of his will to mankind. For if he ever deigns to make such communication, it can only be made immediately by himself, or by inspired men, who speak as the organs of his Holy Spirit. If it be made immediately

by himself, either by means of a divine voice from heaven, or by any supernatural impression on the senses, such a revelation must be itself one of the greatest of miracles. If holy men speak as they are inspired by the Holy Ghost, can their testimony be received with a rational faith, unless it be accompanied by such works, or such clear predictions of future events, above the power, and beyond the foresight of man, as will demonstrate that it is God who speaks by them. In no other way can a divine mission be authenticated. I repeat it then, if it is reasonable to expect a revelation from God in any circumstances of the world; if a revelation is not impossible, or in the highest degree, improbable; miracles are not only not incredible, but necessary. No revelation can found any just claim to the belief of mankind, on any other ground in the first instance, than such supernatural and miraculous operations as the power of God only can effect; or such clear predictions, as none but an omniscient spirit, who foresees the end from the beginning, and has laid the whole train of causes and events in the universe, could impart to the human mind. If then, the christian system contains a real communication to mankind from the infinite fountain of truth, it must have been announced under the seal of great and nume-

rous miracles, for prophecy itself is a species of miracle. On the other hand, if we possess satisfactory evidence that such miracles were wrought at the promulgation of the gospel, we ought to entertain no doubt of its being the word of God; since it comes to us vouched by the seal of God. For what is a miracle? A proper understanding of this term should lie at the foundation of our present inquiry. It is such an inversion, or suspension of the ordinary laws of nature as can be reasonably ascribed only to him by whom those laws were originally ordained. And whenever he condescends to work a miracle, the operation of his almighty power must be regarded, by every rational mind, as the sanction and seal of truth. On this conclusion we may rely with perfect assurance. For the imagination that demons, or any agents inferior to the Deity himself, can control or alter the order of nature which he has established, is contrary to all sound principles—both of philosophy and of religion.*

In exhibiting the direct and positive evidence of christianity, I shall, in the first place, treat of the evidence of miracles; and afterwards of that derived from prophecy.

* This conclusion will be farther confirmed in some future lectures.

To the apostles, the miracles of our blessed Lord were immediate objects of sense: to us they come through the medium of human testimony; but testimony of such a kind, and confirmed by so many, and such extraordinary circumstances accompanying, or following the miracles themselves, and dependent upon them, that no facts, perhaps, in the history of the world have ever descended to posterity vouched by such a weight of moral evidence. They are attested by numerous witnesses of the soundest judgment, and the most unsuspected integrity: by men whose writings evidently demonstrate that they were at the greatest distance from that weakness of mind on the one hand, which would render them liable to be deceived themselves; and, on the other, from that ardent enthusiasm, or that knavery of character, which would incline them to pass a deception upon others for the sake of obtaining credit to their own visions: by men who without any motives of interest or of honour, and even in the certain prospect of disgrace and poverty, of arduous and incessant labours, of continual dangers and persecutions, and at length of death itself in the most formidable shapes, devoted themselves to announce this miraculous history to the world: by men, I add, whose original prepossessions were all opposed to the character

which their Master assumed, and the doctrines which he taught, and who, after a long time, yielded those prejudices only to the force of conviction operated by repeated miracles; and, finally, by men who, in the end, conquered the world, and overturned all its ancient ideas, manners, institutions, all the pride of its philosophy, and all the self-sufficiency of human reason, by the power with which they themselves were endued of operating miracles similar to those which had subdued their own assent. These facts, which will be amplified, and presented to you more in detail in some following lectures, afford, it seems to me, the strongest confirmation of the miraculous history of the gospel, and of the wisdom, the integrity, and credibility of those holy and chosen witnesses by whom God has been pleased to convey it down to us.

But we are met at our very entrance upon this subject with a formidable objection which it is necessary in the first place to remove, before the most credible testimony in favour of the reality of the miracles of our Saviour, will be admitted by those who have undertaken to deny the authority of revelation. The objection may be considered in a speculative, and in a practical view. In the former, the sum of it is: that the plans of infinite wisdom are immutable; for otherwise they would not be perfect.

God himself, therefore, cannot change the order of nature, still less can he allow a feeble mortal, for any purposes whatever, to change it, inasmuch as it has been established by his own most perfect wisdom. I answer, that the plans of divine intelligence must be immutable, as long as the reasons on which they were originally arranged remain the same. But if those reasons are changed, may they not induce a proportionable alteration in the order of providence? Inasmuch then, as the existence, and the whole system of this world, bear a relation to the moral state of man, if man has criminally changed his original state, and although created in innocence, has fallen into sin, although created immortal has become liable to death, can we pronounce it unworthy the goodness, or the wisdom of God, to afford his creature, humbled and conscious of guilt, the hope of mercy, and to confirm that precious hope by such visible interpositions of divine power as leave the penitent sinner no room to doubt but that it is God himself who is the author of his consolation?

The second view in which this objection has been presented is less speculative. It is the celebrated argument ascribed to the ingenuity of Mr. Hume, although it is probably of much earlier origin, and which has exercised the talents of several able and

judicious writers to refute its sophistry.* I think I shall weaken nothing of its force by the following statement: *All our knowledge of natural things we derive solely from experience. And the only rational ground of our belief of what has ever happened, or what can happen in the world, is our own experience of the regular and constant course of nature. Men may impose upon us by false testimony, or they may be deceived themselves; but nature never changes. Inasmuch then, as we have had no experience of any miraculous changes in the order of the world, it is unreasonable to believe that any such have ever taken place, whatever may be the number, or the character of the witnesses by whom they have been attested.* If the principle of this objection is found to be false, the whole objection must fall to the ground with it. If it will not hold in its application universally to other subjects, it is contrary to all just reasoning to admit its validity only against the miracles of the gospel. Let us then try its application in other cases: let us follow it to its ultimate consequences; these will be

* Particularly Dr. Campbell in his treatise on miracles. Bishop Watson in his third letter to Mr. Gibbon, having introduced the subject, appears to me to have, in a few sentences, effectually overturned the principle on which the whole objection rests.

found sufficient to destroy it. It leads to atheism; acted upon in its full extent it would resist all improvements in science; it will be found, in opposing the moral to the physical phenomena of nature, to refute itself. At least the moral phenomena will conclude as strongly in favour of the miracles of the gospel as the physical, admitting the justness of the principle, would seem to contradict them.

I return back on these ideas. And in the first place, it leads to atheism. For, if our own experience is the sole and exclusive ground of judging of whatever is credible in the physical history of the world, it is unreasonable to believe that this globe ever had a beginning, or that it will ever perish. It must always have existed, and must always continue to exist in the same state in which we now behold it. There can be no future condition of existence for human nature, no future judgment, no future retribution to the righteous and the wicked. For each of these states implies a condition of things, such as has never come under our observation, or been the subject of our experience. There is, on this supposition, no foundation for religion. The order of the world must be eternal, immutable, necessary; and can have no dependence on a creating and intelligent cause. We must embrace the philosophical

absurdity of an eternal succession of mutable and perishing beings; and are driven to the impious alternative of believing that there is no God; or, that the universe itself is God.*

These consequences are deduced so obviously from the principle of Mr. Hume, that it is not a little surprising that they have not been more frequently remarked. Scarcely, indeed, have they been observed by any writer who has fallen in my way, except the learned and ingenious Dr. Allix, in his *reflections on the books of the sacred scriptures*.† Yet if they are fairly and legitimately drawn, they must be decisive against the principle in the opinion of every pious and virtuous man.

Another consequence of this doctrine, though not chargeable with impiety like the former, equally demonstrates its absurdity. It would arrest all great improvements in science. When the effects of the electric or magnetic influence, for example, were first discovered, how ought all philosophers, according to

* This tenet of the Aristotelian philosophy has always been regarded by christians as only a modification of atheism.

† This work of Dr. Allix, a celebrated French refugee, was published in London in the year 1688, which sufficiently demonstrates that the objection of Mr. Hume to the miracles of the gospel is not novel; but has only been set in a new light, and urged with more plausibility by that ingenious writer.

this principle, to have treated the history of their phenomena? Precisely as infidels have treated the miraculous history of the gospel: rejected it without examination, as absurd and impossible, because contrary to their *experience*. Do you say, they have it in their power to repeat the experiments by which those new properties in nature were originally discovered. But if the principle which we combat is just, what motive could a philosopher have for repeating these experiments, since his own past experience of the course of nature is the sole criterion of whatever is credible. And whence should the greater portion of mankind derive their knowledge who possess neither the skill, nor the means requisite to make the necessary experiments, if they are not to rely for the truth of new facts in science, and facts the most remote from the analogy of their own experience, upon the testimony of others? Must not the progress of science be arrested almost at its commencement?

Let us take another example in which no experiment can possibly be applied to verify the testimony of the narrators with regard to facts the most certain in nature. The inhabitants of a torrid climate never can have the effects of frost presented to their senses. Congelation is as great a mystery to them, as

any mystery or miracle of the christian religion. According to this favourite maxim of infidelity, then, they ought to refuse all credit to the fact: and the king of Siam acted according to the principles of sound wisdom in punishing the Dutch navigator for insulting his understanding by incredible stories, who assured him, that, in Holland, water became so hard during part of the year, that it bore horses and carriages upon its surface. If testimony were, under no circumstances, sufficient to vouch to us facts which not only are not conformable, but which, in many instances, are contrary, to all our past experience, science must be circumscribed within a very narrow sphere. This consequence was certainly not adverted to by the ingenious author who invented, or who gave its present form to the principle against which we contend. It was aimed solely against the miracles of the sacred scriptures. But when we are testing the merit of a *principle*, if it is not found to hold universally, or coextensively with the latitude of its terms, it cannot furnish the ground of any certain conclusions. For, by what rule shall we apply it only to the facts of religion, when it is false in its application to the facts of science? Miracles then, as well as other extraordinary facts in nature, are susceptible of proof from testimony. The only subject of

inquiry is, the competence and integrity of the witnesses: the soundness of their judgment, the accuracy of their observation, the fidelity of their narration. In all these respects the disciples of our blessed Saviour, the witnesses of his miracles will be found to possess a decided superiority over the witnesses of any other facts recorded in history. Their writings demonstrate their wisdom; their long intimacy with their Master is sufficient to give us confidence in the accuracy of their observation; their labours, their sacrifices, their deaths, attest their sincerity, and the fidelity of their narration.*

I maintain, in the last place, that this celebrated argument, drawn from our experience of the uniformity of nature, refutes itself. For, if the physical course of nature, on which the argument rests, is found to be stable and uniform, the moral order of things appears to be not less steady and regular. If the former of these facts opposes, upon Mr. Hume's principle, our reception of the miraculous history of the gospel; the latter, upon the same ground, forbids the rejection of that history, if, by rejecting it, we must contradict all the moral phenomena of human nature. Admitting then, what can hardly be denied by the bitterest enemies of christianity, that the apos-

* These topics will hereafter be more amply illustrated.

ties and evangelists were men of the soundest understandings,* and the most upright hearts, it is contrary to all that we know of the motives of human conduct, that, for the sake of propagating a most improbable, and to them, unprofitable imposture, they should voluntarily submit to incessant toils and extreme sufferings; they should abandon all that is usually accounted most dear to the human heart, and march with intrepidity through perpetual persecutions to certain death inflicted in the most excruciating and dreadful forms. Their writings, which are always rational in their doctrines, simple in their style, and calm and judicious in their manner of address, exempt them from every charge of enthusiasm; yet, renouncing all the early prejudices of their nation, in which they had been educated, and all the hopes which they had originally conceived from a royal and triumphant Messiah, which might have inflamed the zeal of enthusiastic minds, do we not see them, for a suffering Master, encounter every actual evil, and every possible hazard? If then, we

* The perfection of that system of piety and morals published by these humble fishermen, so far excelling the philosophy of their age, demonstrates that, if they were not inspired from above, they must have possessed a degree of wisdom and understanding far surpassing whatever antiquity has produced besides.

should suppose, according to the spirit of this objection, that the apostles, who expected no recompense in this world, could have acted from any other motive than a deep conviction of the miraculous power, and the divine mission of Jesus Christ, would we not be involved in contradictions to the moral order of things; that is, to all the ordinary principles of conduct among men which have ever occurred to our *experience*, not less wonderful, and out of the course of nature, than were the miracles themselves in the attestation of which these wise and pious men, the companions and witnessess of his life, made such astonishing and almost incredible sacrifices?

Thus does this so much vaunted objection against the miracles of the gospel refute itself; inasmuch as, in its application to the moral order of things, it contradicts the conclusion which the enemies of religion have drawn from their physical order. And this consequence ought to be admitted by those especially who have most earnestly urged this objection against the evangelic history, since, according to their philosophic system, they subject the natural and the moral world equally to the laws of necessity. I repeat, then, that it is not by the nature of the works ascribed to Christ as being conformable, or contradictory to our experience, but by the charac-

ter and competence of the witnesses, together with all the preparatory and attending circumstances of these miracles, and their consequences upon the world, that the question of their truth is to be decided.

E

LECTURE IV.

The credibility of the Witnesses of the Miracles and Resurrection of Christ.

LET us then enter a little more particularly into the character of the witnesses of the gospel, the circumstances under which its miraculous history was published to the world, and has been transmitted to us, and the wonderful consequences which followed its publication. A brief review of these topics, while it will confirm the answer which has been given to the objection of Mr. Hume, particularly in the last view which we have taken of it, will serve, at the same time, to strengthen our faith in the evangelic history, both by the support which we will find it possesses in the clearest and most unequivocal laws of moral evidence, and by the extraordinary effects which have resulted from it, which plainly required the power of a divine cause to produce them.

As it has been shown that there is no insuperable objection, arising from the nature of miracles, against their existence, when alleged in favour of a divine

revelation; and as they have been demonstrated even to be necessary (proofs) of a divine mission, if God should ever deign to reveal his will in any extraordinary manner to the world, the credit of the miracles which are said to have been wrought in confirmation of the gospel must depend primarily on the credibility of the witnesses who have attested them. And, when this subject is fairly and candidly examined, not only will these witnesses be found entitled to the highest credit, but their testimony will appear calculated almost irresistibly to command our assent; with so many circumstances of authority and certainty is it attended, which place it far before the evidence by which any other facts in the compass of universal history have been vouched.

The witnesses of extraordinary facts ought to be men of unblemished integrity, and of clear and penetrating discernment; unbiassed by any motives of interest which might be liable to blind them to the truth, or to corrupt the purity of their testimony. And certainly the apostles and evangelists of our blessed Lord have left us, in their writings, their discourses, and their conduct, the most indubitable proofs of the soundest understanding, of the sincerest piety, and the most disinterested devotedness to the best interests of mankind, which would render it

impossible, in a long course of intimacy with their Master, to be deceived by any fictitious demonstrations of a divine power, and should free them from every suspicion of fabricating a history to impose upon the world.

They were, indeed, plain, unlettered men, called from some of the humblest occupations in life to follow Christ, and to be the heralds of his grace to mankind. But this circumstance, instead of detracting from their merit as witnesses of the miracles of our Lord, will, when rightly considered, give additional weight to their testimony. For, when we take into view that admirable and profound wisdom, that perfect moral code, and that pure and sublime theology, which their writings contain, so far superior to what was to be expected from their education and rank in life, and excelling whatever has appeared on these subjects in the systems of the most venerated sages of the pagan world; may we not well ask, as the astonished fellow citizens of Jesus did with respect to him, *whence had these men this wisdom*, unless it were given them from above? If we admit that this wisdom was imparted to them immediately by God, it decides the question of their divine mission. If we say it was simply the effect of native genius, it decides their competency, in point of understand-

ing and judgment, to be witnesses of the wonderful history of our Lord, and their perfect title to our fullest credit, as far as depends on accuracy of observation, and the judicious discrimination of truth from all false pretences to miraculous powers.

But in the next place, their writings exhibit also the strongest characters of sincerity and integrity. We discern in them no appearance of that art which is necessary to cover the pretences of imposture, but an undesigning simplicity which speaks powerfully to the heart. Hardly ever can impostors effectually conceal the faults of their own character behind the disguises of hypocrisy. But in the New Testament, we discern only the purest precepts of morality, and the noblest sentiments of a genuine and rational piety. If the apostles speak from their hearts, as there is every appearance that they do, the purity of their doctrines, as well as the simplicity of the manner in which they are conveyed to us,* are calculated to impress us with a deep conviction of their integrity and uprightness, not less than of their wisdom.

* Piety and sincerity have a language peculiar to themselves; simple and unaffected, equally distant from the tortuous art of imposture, and the extravagances of enthusiasm. There is a *naïveté* which runs through the whole narration of the evangelists, and bears all the impressions of truth, infinitely remote from the style of an artificial tale made up by cunning and designing men.

This conviction will be greatly strengthened when we take into our view the circumstances under which the followers of our blessed Lord published the gospel, and its miraculous history to the world. Their disinterested labours, sufferings, and sacrifices, demonstrate in the strongest manner their sincerity, and their profound persuasion of the truth and the importance of those holy doctrines which they taught, and those astonishing facts which they published to the universe. And the perfect sincerity and persuasion of men, at once so pious and so wise, who were so capable of discriminating reality from pretence, and who had so many opportunities of intimately observing the works which they attest, afford to the candid and serious inquirer, the most satisfactory grounds of belief.

Let us contemplate the disinterestedness and sufferings of the first ministers of christianity, and witnesses of the miracles of our Saviour. They speak a powerful language to the heart, and leave us no room to question the sincerity and the perfect veracity of these faithful men. It is true that men, impelled by a bold and ardent ambition, or inflamed by the hope of fortune, or of glory, may sometimes endure with fortitude the greatest sufferings, or encounter with firmness the most formidable dangers.

But without the prospects of honour or emolument, and in the face of poverty and disgrace, of universal obloquy and hatred, of the fiercest persecutions and the most cruel deaths, voluntarily to undertake to propagate a known and deliberate imposture, merely for the glory of a Master who had already perished by an ignominious death, and from whom, of consequence, no farther expectations could be entertained; and, with a patience and heroism worthy only of the highest virtue and the noblest ends, to consent to be the ministers of falsehood, deceit and villany, is contrary to all the known principles of human action, and, in such men as the apostles, is utterly incredible. Jesus Christ promised to his disciples no rewards in the execution of their arduous mission but such as should take place in a future state of existence; of which they could have no other assurance than his own miracles. If then they made such astonishing sacrifices, as it is known they did make, from no rational motive, with no prospect of recompense, it was a solitary phenomenon, altogether inexplicable on any of the ordinary principles of conduct among men. On the other hand, if they were governed by the hope of future and celestial rewards, their belief of which could rest only on their perfect conviction of the truth of the miracles and resurrection of the

Saviour, what stronger evidence could we demand of the reality of these facts?

Their Master not only promised them no rewards, but forewarned them that they should suffer in his cause every evil that could be inflicted by the hatred, the malice, and the power of men. And they were accordingly exposed to every form of contumely, pain and death. They were loaded with chains, thrust into dungeons, lacerated with scourging, crucified, sawn asunder, clothed with the skins of wild beasts and exposed to be hunted by dogs, burnt at the stake, invested with pitched shirts, to which when fire was applied, they were used as torches in the night to light the barbarous sports of the populace.* These terrors were sufficient, one would think, to shake the constancy of integrity itself; but certainly, more than sufficient to appal hypocrisy and

* A variety of passages in the epistles of the apostles, and in the history of their acts by Saint Luke, give us this representation of their extreme sufferings, which is confirmed by almost all the Roman writers of that period who have come down to us; particularly by Suetonius, Pliny, Juvenal, Martial, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, and Tacitus. "Their sufferings at their execution, says Tacitus, were aggravated by insult and mockery; for some were disguised in the skins of wild beasts, and worried to death by dogs; some were crucified, and others were wrapt in pitched shirts, and set on fire when the day was closed, that they might serve as lights to illuminate the night."

falsehood, or even the least doubtfulness of the cause in which they were embarked. But by no fear of suffering, nor by any hope of reprieve could these good men be moved to retract, or to mutilate or disguise, any part of the history of a Master who was dearer to them than their own lives. If they would only have denied the resurrection of Christ, they could have delivered themselves out of the most cruel sufferings, which were often such that we can hardly conceive how human nature could support them. Yet their dying breath, their last accents were still used to confirm their unwavering testimony. And among such numbers, not one was found to falter. What can mark in the minds of men a deeper conviction of truth?

A consideration which gives no small additional weight to the argument is, that all the original prejudices of their education, and of national pride and glory, were strongly opposed to the character in which their Master appeared, and to the doctrines which they were afterwards constrained to preach. They, with the whole nation of Israel, expected in the Messiah a mighty temporal prince, invested with the splendours of empire, who was to restore the kingdom of David, and extend its dominion over all the kingdoms of the world, in which his followers

and disciples were to arrive at the highest honours and distinctions. When, therefore, they found all the prepossessions, in which they had been nursed, and which had been cherished by their country for ages, overthrown; when Jesus informed them that *his kingdom was not of this world*, a doctrine which they could hardly be made to understand, and thus disappointed all their most flattering hopes; when, instead of the magnificent prospects which they had pictured to themselves, he set before them only his own humble fortunes, and his approaching death; only the persecutions to which they should be exposed in preaching in the name of a despised Master, what could have continued to attach them to a cause so different in every respect from what they had conceived, and one apparently so desperate, but the manifest proofs of divinity which attended him, but those wonderful facts before their eyes, which conquered their prejudices, and compelled their conviction? They could not believe that he was to die till they saw him expire; they neither believed, nor understood the resurrection of the dead till they saw him restored from the tomb. Even then, it was long, through the astonishment of their minds, before they could give full credit to their own senses. They conversed with him, they touched him, they thrust their

hands into his wounded side. They could yield such powerful prejudices, supported by all the strongest passions of human nature, only to the most sensible demonstrations. But when their conviction was once conquered by the illustrious displays of a divine power, and nothing but the most illustrious displays of such a power could have conquered it in opposition to every interest and every prejudice hitherto cherished by them with the greatest fondness, then they, who had before been so reluctant, so unbelieving, so timid in the cause of a suffering Master, were ready to encounter every form of danger, of suffering, and of death, in proclaiming the resurrection, and the miraculous history of their Lord. Such a revolution in their ideas and their conduct must have proceeded, as they declared it did, only from the irresistible manifestations of a divine power with which he confirmed his doctrine, and demonstrated his title to a spiritual and heavenly kingdom.

It may be said that fortitude and patience in enduring sufferings is no certain proof of the truth of any system of principles; because an enthusiastic mind may be so wound up, as to dare any danger, or to support any pain, in defence of its favourite opinions. I confess that voluntary suffering in any cause is not an infallible test of *truth*, but it is a test of

sincerity. It demonstrates the full persuasion of the soul of the reality of the facts for which it suffers. This is all that is necessary to command our assent in the present case. The disciples of our Lord have demonstrated, by this infallible criterion, their full conviction of the reality of his resurrection, and of his miraculous operations. These were objects of the senses in which they could not be mistaken. They were men, as appears from their writings, of the soundest understandings, who could not, therefore, be imposed upon in cases so palpable. No tincture of enthusiasm, which could warp their imagination, appears in their conduct, or in that history which they have left us of the life and actions of Christ. Men as they were, of sound understandings and of rational piety, a conviction in our minds of the sincerity of their declarations is all that is necessary to gain for them full credence to the miraculous facts which they relate. There is a wide difference between dying in attestation of a *fact*, and to prove our adherence to an *opinion*. In our opinions we may err, and an ✓ enthusiastic mind may maintain its errors at the stake with no less ardour than it would adhere to truth. But in *facts*, such as those related by the apostles and disciples of our Lord, subjected as they were to the examination of all the senses, and for so

long a time, it was impossible for men so judicious, so honest, and so faithful, to be deceived. Their sincerity is all that we need to assure us of the miracles contained in the evangelic history. And their constant readiness to seal their testimony with their blood affords the strongest proof that not the smallest doubt mingled itself with their perfect knowledge and belief of the resurrection, and of all the miraculous works of their Saviour, on which their faith of his divine mission, and of the doctrine of salvation which they proclaimed to the world, was founded.

If the preceding reflections are just, the miracles of Christ are confirmed to us by an evidence which ought to command our fullest assent. And if his miracles are established, the divinity of his mission and of his gospel, follows as a necessary consequence.*

Having then, in the first place, demonstrated this principle, that our experience of the uniformity of nature does not afford any solid objection against miracles performed in a cause worthy of God; we

* Celsus, the most ingenious and perhaps the bitterest enemy of the christians among the philosophers of that age, does not pretend to deny the miracles ascribed to Jesus Christ, but seems disposed to impute them to the powers of magic. The science of modern times will never admit such a solution of miraculous phenomena.

have seen, in the next place, that if any supernatural event is capable of being confirmed by human testimony, there can exist no reasonable doubt with regard to the reality of the miracles of the gospel. And I must again repeat, that no facts in the compass of universal history have come down to us confirmed by such variety, and such strength of evidence.

This conclusion will be confirmed when we proceed, in the next lecture, to consider the rapid extension of the gospel over the most enlightened nations of the world, who were, from their pride, their prejudices, their learning, their civil and religious institutions, and from all their ideas and habits, most hostile to the spirit of our holy religion. It will be farther confirmed hereafter, when we proceed to explain the excellence of the gospel itself, and to show how worthy it is of the origin which it claims, and how far superior its doctrines are to any powers of invention which can reasonably be ascribed to men, of the education and rank in life of Christ and the apostles, supposing them not to be inspired, and illuminated by a divine spirit.

LECTURE V.

The rapid extension of the Gospel an infallible proof of the reality of its Miracles.

THE rapid extension of the christian religion throughout the principal nations of the world, although it is usually placed among the collateral and presumptive evidences of the truth of the gospel history, may reasonably be considered as furnishing a strong and *direct proof* of the reality of the miracles of our Saviour, and of the miraculous powers with which the apostles themselves were endued. This astonishing, and, as we shall hereafter see, this unparalleled effect was accomplished by publishing the miraculous history of Christ, by a few fishermen of Judea, and by the pretences, at least, set up by them to the same miraculous powers imparted to them by their Master. And can it reasonably be believed that the story of miracles performed in Judea, a remote and despised corner of the world, should have been received by the greatest as well as the most barbarous nations, in the circumstances in which it was re-

ceived, and followed by the mighty consequences which actually resulted from it, unless the heralds who published it had been able to confirm their testimony by the most palpable demonstrations of a divine power accompanying their preaching? On no other ground do I think we can propose any rational solution of this great moral phenomenon.)

Let us then examine the greatness of the effect, and compare it with the circumstances of the world at that period, and with the apparent impotence of the instruments by which it was produced, and, I doubt not, this conviction will meet us with almost irresistible force.

We learn from the history of the acts of the apostles, which contains, however, but a very brief and partial narration of their transactions, and from various intimations either more direct or incidental, given in the epistles, especially of Saint Paul, that the gospel had spread, within a very few years after the death of the Saviour, to all the regions of the known world, and in every country had made numerous converts. This representation is confirmed by the Roman writers when any occasion leads them to mention the numbers of christians in particular districts of the empire.* Tacitus, speaking of the cruel-

* It is true that the early Roman writers do not make frequent

ties exercised by Nero upon the christians under the pretence of their having set fire to the city, says, "at first, those only were apprehended who *confessed* themselves to be of that sect, but, through their means, a *vast multitude* were afterwards discovered."

This imperial villany took place about the thirtieth year of the crucifixion; in which short period the gospel had extended from the extremities to the heart of the Roman empire, and a *vast multitude* of its disciples were already found in the capital. About forty years posterior to this event Pliny, writing to the emperor Trajan for instructions in what manner to treat the christians, who had, in time past, been mercilessly dragged before the tribunals, and cruelly punished, represents to him that so prevalent had christianity become in his province, which consisted of Pontus and Bithynia in the Lesser Asia, that the *superstition*, as he calls it, had seized not only the cities, but the smaller towns, and the open country. The temples, he adds, were for a time,

or very particular mention of the affairs of the christians. For christianity springing up in Judea, it was natural for foreigners to regard them as a sect of the Jews, on which account their history, in its origin, would be little understood, and attract small attention at Rome. But wherever their external circumstances are noticed by Roman authors, they are found to correspond with the accounts given of them in christian records.

almost deserted, the sacred solemnities intermitted, and victims had nearly ceased being purchased.* Justin Martyr, who wrote only a few years after Pliny, declares, "there is not a nation either of Greek, or barbarian, or any other name, even of those who wander in tribes and live in tents, among whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered to the Father and Creator of the universe in the name of the crucified Jesus." And Tertullian, who flourished half a century later, after appealing to the rulers of the Roman empire for the diffusion of the christian religion at that epoch throughout its immense extent, enumerates many nations beyond its limits, as the Moors, the Getulians, the Sarmatians, the Dacians, the Germans, and the Scythians, who had become converts to the truth. "And, saith he, although we are so great a multitude that, in almost every city, we form *the majority of the inhabitants*, we pass our time modestly and in silence." To these nations St. Jerom adds the Indians, the Persians, the Goths, and the Egyptians. But, not to multiply quotations, it is well known that, in less than three centuries, the whole Roman world had become christian.

Having, in this cursory manner, presented to your view the wide and rapid extension of the christian

* C. Plin. Traj. imp. lib. 10. epist. 97.

doctrine in the first age, let us, in the next place, compare it with the feeble instruments employed in this great work, and with the difficulties which they had to encounter, and, I persuade myself, it will appear to you to be an effect altogether out of the ordinary laws, and beyond the ordinary powers of human nature.

Our blessed Saviour, in order more clearly to demonstrate his own immediate agency, and almighty power, in the spiritual conquests achieved by the doctrine of the cross, as well as to manifest his infinite grace in proclaiming the glad tidings of salvation to the poor, chose for the instruments of so great a work twelve humble fishermen. Circumscribed by their occupation in the sphere of their ideas, little acquainted with human nature, ignorant of the arts and manners of cultivated society, and destitute of the learning and talents necessary to command the attention and respect of mankind in an age so polished and enlightened as that in which they lived, they seemed the most incompetent of all men to effect such an extraordinary revolution in the whole moral state of the world. Exposed to contempt on account of their original employment, this was not a little increased by the hatred in which their country was held. For the Jews were regarded with extreme

aversion by the rest of mankind, chiefly for the abhorrence which they manifested of the customs, religions, and gods of all other nations. And of all parts of Judea, the district of Galilee from which they sprung, and the town of Nazareth esteemed the native place of their Master, were viewed with the greatest disdain. A Galilean and a Nazarene were names of reproach even at Jerusalem. Yet, with such feeble instruments, and in so short a period of time, did the ascended Saviour, just after he had exhibited before the view of mankind the most discouraging proofs of his own assumed weakness in the death to which he submitted, subdue the world to the obedience of the gospel, overturn the altars and the temples of paganism, banish from their shrines the idols with their priests, change the moral and religious systems of the universe; in one word, overthrow, and utterly eradicate from the hearts of men, whatever the revolution of ages had rendered most venerable and sacred in their esteem; whatever had been most firmly incorporated with their interests and their pleasures, or most deeply intrenched among their prejudices. This astonishing revolution, which not all the wisdom of their sages, combined with all the power of their princes, could have effected, was the work of a few Galilean fishermen, aided only by

one man of eloquence and cultivated talents. And how was it effected? By the most improbable of all means: preaching the miraculous history of a crucified man, together with the doctrines of repentance and self-denial so revolting to the corrupted tastes of human nature. May I not, then, confidently demand if the rapid extension of the religion of Christ under the agency of such instruments, by the preaching of such doctrines, through countries so various and distant, and so opposite in manners, in language, in political interests, in religious customs and ideas, and in all those distinctive peculiarities which divide and alienate nations from one another, does not contain, in the greatness and the extraordinary nature of the effect, a demonstration of the reality of the miracles by which it was accomplished? Could obscure and despised strangers have carried the triumphs of the humble cross to the ends of the earth, and fixed the hopes of the world on a dying Saviour, unless they had borne in their hands the credentials of heaven, and displayed to the senses, and the inmost convictions of mankind, the seal of their heavenly mission in the constant operations of a divine and omnipotent power attending their ministry? Their success could not have flowed from their powers of persuasion, nor the force of their

reasonings; for they were not themselves masters of eloquence or of science. But if they had been instructed in all the wisdom of the schools, the sages of the pagan world had long since found that the mass of mankind are incapable of entering into the speculations of philosophy. By philosophic reasoning they had never been able to do any thing effectual for the reformation of the world. The apostles simply propounded the moral maxims, and divine dogmas of their great Teacher, confirming them by the supernatural evidence of the works which he enabled them to perform. Thus their doctrines rested on the same proofs with those principles of natural religion, which the Creator has inscribed with his own hand, and impressed by his own power on the face of nature, I mean the characters which it bears of his omnipotence. No other even plausible account can be given of a phenomenon unparalleled in the annals of the world. For, however reluctant reason may be to admit miracles, no miracle was ever so great as such a revolution would be, effected by twelve illiterate fishermen, without the immediate cooperation and aids of the Holy Spirit.

If we consider the difficulties and the apparently insurmountable obstacles which opposed the success of the apostles, they will furnish strong additional

proofs that these humble ministers of the Redeemer must have been endued with miraculous powers.

I will not repeat here those impediments which naturally arose out of the obscurity of their own station; the hatred or contempt with which their nation was viewed; and their utter destitution of all those talents of learning and eloquence which are calculated to command the respect and admiration of the world. Under all these disadvantages, which were more than sufficient to ruin the success of men who were not inspired from heaven, without patronage, without friends, without respect for their personal attributes, or influence from the character of their nation, were they obliged to pass with the gospel in their hands into the remotest countries, among unknown people, ever prone to receive strangers with jealousy, or to look down upon them with contemptuous disdain. In this case, their contempt of these poor and foreign fishermen would be very greatly increased by their bringing to them what, to their apprehension, would be only a miraculous story of a crucified man. And their indignation would be raised to the highest pitch, when they found themselves required, at the recital of such a story, to abandon their religion and their gods, all the principles of their education and their habits of

living; and whatever the usage of their ancestors, for so many ages, had rendered sacred to them, and incorporated with their domestic manners, their religious institutions, and their national customs.

What nation ever willingly changes its gods? However contemptible the idols of paganism appear to us, the vulgar mind which seldom reasons, but usually takes all its impressions from education, or from its natural sympathy with public opinion, then regarded them with that reverence, and embraced them with that full belief with which we always see the ignorant receive the traditionary fables of their country. Perhaps the objects of superstition, making their impression in the tenderest period of life, and being therefore, more perfectly mingled with the earliest habits of feeling, take a deeper hold upon the minds of the common mass of mankind, than the principles of a more pure and rational piety. But if the prejudices of the populace presented almost insuperable difficulties to the apostles, the interests of the rulers presented others, perhaps, still more formidable. The religion of all those nations was incorporated with the policy of the state. Their magistrates were their priests. Its ceremonies were blended with all the offices of the civil government. So that the gospel was obliged to combat, at the same time, with the blind superstition

and furious bigotry of the multitude, with the wealth and power of the temples, and with the pride and jealousy of tyrannical rulers armed with the sword, who were afraid of nothing so much as of innovation. We may safely appeal to the common sense of mankind if obstacles like these must not have been utterly insuperable to such men as the apostles, going out to the world solely in their own powers of reasoning and persuasion, without the supernatural aid and the accompanying testimony of the Holy Spirit of Truth.

The natural difficulties of this great undertaking were almost incalculably increased by the fate of their Master, whose miraculous history, whose life, death, and resurrection they were commanded to publish, and in whose name they were commissioned to preach. Crucifixion was the most ignominious punishment among the Romans, reserved only for the most detested criminals. Nothing could shock the ideas of such a people more than to elevate to the rank of a divinity a *crucified man*, the native of a remote, dependent, and despised province, who had suffered like a malefactor and slave for alleged crimes against the dominant state. This circumstance alone was sufficient, according to the common apprehensions of the world, to blast entirely their hopes

of success. Of the magnitude of this difficulty we may frame some conception by putting an analogous case. Suppose that a man of the lowest extraction, and the obscurest country of Europe, had, for imputed treasons, been suspended on a gibbet, or hung in chains; and that his accomplices, ignorant men, without talents, and without character, should presume to defy the government by declaring that he was risen from the dead, and that they were come in his name, and in contradiction to the civil authority, to overturn all the religious institutions, and all the objects of worship and veneration in the christian world, and such is the light in which the disciples must have appeared to those proud nations, and that polished age, with what reception would they now meet?

Combining together then, all these reflections, and computing the result, may I not confidently demand of all reasonable and candid men, who will fairly estimate the magnitude and difficulty of the work of converting a world in the name of a crucified man, who will consider the weakness, and unpromising character of the instruments by which it was effected, and unite with both the astonishing rapidity of their success, if the apostles must not have been aided by a power infinitely superior to their own? if

they must not have carried to the hearts and senses of their hearers the strongest conviction of the truth of the miracles of Jesus Christ? and if they must not have supported the wonderful history of their Master by miracles which they were themselves enabled to perform: miracles of no doubtful aspect, but obvious and palpable, capable of standing the most rigorous scrutiny of envy, of hatred, of interest, of every wounded prejudice, and of all the ingenuity which a learned and enlightened age could bring to the investigation. Nothing less can account for the vast and surprising effect which the simplicity of the christian doctrine, and of the primitive ministers of christianity, has been seen to produce. As miracles appear to be the only power which could have given such a rapid extension to the religion of Christ, in that enlightened and inquisitive period, throughout such various, proud, and hostile nations; so the rapidity of its extension in the face of infinite difficulties, furnishes one of the most irresistible evidences of the reality of the miracles.

LECTURE VI.

The rapid progress of Christianity a proof of its Miracles.

Comparison of it with the Reformation from Popery: With the success of modern Missionaries: With the progress of Mahometanism.

IN the last lecture I endeavoured to establish this conclusion, that the rapid and extensive progress of the christian religion, in the circumstances in which it was propagated, is an almost irrefragable evidence of the authenticity of the miraculous history of our blessed Saviour, and of the reality of the miraculous powers with which the apostles, who published it, claimed to be invested by him. At that period the world was in the highest state of civilization to which it had ever attained, and learning and philosophy were in their meridian. (Mankind so enlightened by science, as they would be more able to detect, so they would be more inclined to examine and expose any imposture which should be attempted to be practised upon them. The apostles, destitute of the knowledge of polite letters, and sprung from a na-

tion regarded by the Greeks and Romans with supercilious disdain, were oppressed by every discouragement in the prosecution of the immense work of changing the religion and the moral state of the world, and were opposed by difficulties which must have been absolutely insurmountable by merely human power or wisdom. Unless they had been lunatic, could they ever have hoped to succeed in such an enterprise by a fictitious and improbable tale, put together by their own powers of invention, and recommended only by their own faculties of elocution? What persuasive power, indeed, could a few unlearned Jews have possessed over nations who had been accustomed to witness the highest efforts of the polished and impressive eloquence of Greece and Rome? If they had laboured under no other disadvantage, their ignorance or imperfect knowledge of the various languages of the people whom they addressed, must, on the supposition that they were not miraculously endued with the gift of tongues, have been insuperable. No circumstances expose strangers to greater contempt and ridicule than ignorance of the proper force of words, and of the true idiom and pronunciation of our language.* If it is admitted that the

* And on the supposition that the apostles claimed to possess the knowledge of so many languages by divine inspiration; if the

apostles, poor and humble as they were, possessed so many different languages in their purity and perfection, the fact of their inspiration must be admitted. If, to avoid this consequence, it is said that each apostle might have made himself master of at least one language, and that thus the whole college of apostles distributed into different countries, might have moved in concert in promoting the same great design; this supposition, not less than the former, would imply the necessity of a divine interposition in order to accomplish the effect which we have seen produced by the preaching of the gospel. If one apostle were planted in Persia, another in Egypt, and another in Syria, in Greece, in Italy, or Gaul, giving twelve separate countries to the individual labours of the apostolic college, is it within the bounds of human probability, that, among people so various in their manners, languages, institutions, interests, these several apostles should meet precisely with the same reception, and be attended with the same success, till the whole world should at length find itself christian? Do moral revolutions, when not imposed by conquest, proceed in different and even hostile nations, with such a uniform as well as rapid pace,

(fact were not so, must not the ear of every common man in every country have refuted and confounded them?

and with such unity of character and design? There is surely no similar example in the history of mankind.

Every light in which this subject can be placed still leads to this result, that such a revolution as that which christianity has produced in the world, so important in its nature, so difficult in its achievement, and so extensive and rapid in its progress, was utterly beyond the faculties of the apostles *unless God had been with them.*

Let me repeat, with some variation, an analogous case, which I have already proposed to you in the preceding lecture. I repeat it because I think it calculated to carry conviction with it to a candid mind. Suppose that a small number of obscure Jews in the present age, and they are not more despised now than they were in the time of Augustus, or Tiberius Cæsar, should attempt to produce a similar revolution in Europe, in the name of a man who had been executed on a gallows, whom they should declare they had seen alive after his execution, and who, they should add, had commanded them to go forth and change the moral systems, and religious institutions of all nations; and let us suppose further, that they could produce no authority for the confirmation of their pretensions, except a fabricated story of

certain wonderful works which they had seen him perform in a distant country, what consequences can we imagine would result from the preaching of such apostles? Must not their scheme end in disappointment, and they themselves be exposed to ridicule and contempt; if, indeed, the authors of a project which would be an indication only of insanity should be thought worthy even of ridicule? Must not the first preachers of christianity then have possessed very different powers from these men? Must they not have been able, in every region, to produce before the eyes of mankind the attestation, and seal of heaven to their mission?

If the enemies of religion persist in affirming that there was nothing in the introduction and establishment of christianity above, or different from the ordinary laws of nature; nothing but what can be solved on the known principles of the human mind, they ought to be able to produce some fact to support this bold allegation. The moral science of man ought, like natural science, to be founded on experience. Let them then produce any parallel example from the history of the world of such a mighty and sudden change accomplished either by the fervors of enthusiasm, or by the arts of imposture. Till this is done, we are justified, on every fair

ground of argumentation, to deny its practicability. As they have never yet pointed to any case in which we can trace any resemblance to the establishment of christianity, let us examine such facts within the compass of known history, as are supposed to bear the greatest analogy to it.

The introduction of the *Vedas*, and the *Zend*, into India and Persia, is too remote in time to afford us any light in this inquiry. They are probably no more than collections of the ancient traditions and usages of the respective nations, to which some wise men have given a more precise and definite form, and added the pretended sanction of a divine authority. They are, in a word, the old religion of the people more perfectly organized, and adapted, perhaps, to the circumstances of an improved state of society. The introduction, therefore, of these codes of civil, moral, and religious legislation into those countries, would require no more than a profound veneration in the people for the virtue and wisdom of their authors.

If we look into those periods of history which are characterized by greater certainty, we can find nothing in the changes of the world after the mighty revolution, occasioned by the arms and the koran of Mahomet, of which I shall afterwards speak, which

can bear any comparison with the rapid and extensive propagation of christianity in the first age, unless it be the reformation of a great portion of the christian nations from the abuses of popery, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But when this extraordinary revolution in the religious state of Europe is accurately examined, and compared with the original propagation of the christian doctrine, the similarity which, on a superficial view, seemed to exist between them, entirely vanishes. The reformation from popery was not the introduction of a new religion, but the correction of errors which had insinuated themselves into the ancient system. Christianity had nothing in common with paganism. It overturned the heathen altars and temples from the foundation. The catholic and the protestant on the other hand, acknowledged a common standard of divine truth, to which both parties appealed for the decision of their differences. Their disputes concerned chiefly the interpretation of this standard. The protestants were learned men discussing the doctrines of the scriptures with men of equal learning. And when these were fairly laid open to the people, every man was capable of judging which party walked most conformably to their divine rule. No extraordinary powers were here requisite to procure an audience

for poor and despised strangers preaching an unknown religion; for these leaders of the reformation were men of the same country, of the same religion with the people whom they addressed, and possessing among their countrymen the highest respect for virtue, piety, and talents. They needed not miracles to confirm to distant nations the miraculous history of their master; for that history was already embraced by their hearers with full faith. Europe was prepared for a favourable reception of their doctrines by a long train of causes which had operated with a constant and increasing influence on the public mind from the period of the revival of letters;* and the whole christian world was, at the era of the reformation, anticipating and wishing for a change in the established system of superstition. We find little analogy, therefore, between the reformation from popery, and the original propagation of the christian religion, in their causes, their instruments, or the difficulties which they had respectively to encounter; and certainly no ground for the presumption that the gospel could have been introduced and propagated, in the manner which we have seen, by any means

* See these causes admirably elucidated by Dr. Robertson in his History of Charles V.

merely human, or indeed, without the most visible and miraculous interposition of heaven.

A greater resemblance exists between the state of the apostles in the primitive age, and that of the missionaries who, in very recent periods, have been sent from various nations in Europe to carry the light of the gospel to the benighted savages of Africa and America, and the half civilized worshippers of Brama and of Fo. Both were commissioned to preach the gospel to idolaters; both travelled for that purpose into remote nations whose manners, customs, languages, and religious ideas were wholly different from theirs. But the vast disparity of their success will serve to confirm the conclusion which we had drawn from previous facts, that the apostles must have been invested with divine powers which modern missionaries do not possess.

These missionaries have generally been men distinguished for piety, zeal, activity, self-denial, and fortitude, and for all those qualities most requisite for the successful discharge of the arduous duties required in such an undertaking. They were apostles in every thing but the power of working miracles. They have preached the same truths which once so rapidly subdued the world to the obedience of faith; they have spoken in the name of the same Saviour

to whom the nations once hastened to bow. They have addressed themselves both to civilized and savage people. But, with what effect? Hitherto we have reason only to deplore their want of success. From China and Japan the missionaries, after long and fruitless labours, have been entirely banished. In India, the lapse of two centuries has produced only a very small number of converts, and those chiefly among such persons as had been excluded from their respective *casts*,* and deprived of their hereditary honours in their own country. And often the pious missionaries have the affliction to find these pretended converts, after a short period, returning to the profligate habits which had already disgraced them with their countrymen. Thirty years the Moravians laboured in Greenland with a zeal which, perhaps,

* The Casts are the several grades or classes of society in India into which the people are divided. These classes are hereditary; and the rights attached to them are esteemed, especially by the superior Casts, a precious inheritance. To be ejected from the Cast in which a man was born is the highest disgrace, and renders him infamous. The Bramins and the Naires, which are the priestly and the military orders, are the noblest. They have never yet condescended to receive the missionaries with that attention and respect to which their great piety and virtue entitle them. And I believe these pious and zealous men have not hitherto been able to number any of these orders among their converts.

has never been surpassed in the christian church. But to this day, says Dr. Paley, the savage inhabitants pay little attention to their preaching except to demand of them some divine token to prove that the doctrines which they teach are really from God. In Africa, in the islands of the Southern Ocean, and in America, all the exertions of christians have as yet, been equally fruitless.*

* I fear that a pious warmth of heart, not sufficiently under the reign of judgment, in several of the eastern missionaries, is leading some good men, equally sanguine, and precipitate in building their hopes upon their wishes, into no inconsiderable mistakes upon this subject. The missionary, gratified in engaging the attention, and being able to make some serious impressions upon a few persons in the Indian nations, sits down in the fervour of the moment and communicates the information, coloured by his feelings, to his European or American correspondent. Various pious persons seeing these letters or being informed of the same events, so flattering to the hopes of piety, hasten to convey the pleasing intelligence to others. The letters are published. Coming from different persons, though relating to the same or nearly the same events, they seem to contain a mass of information, and to open prospects to the church, which are by no means justified by the facts, when carefully detached and minutely examined. Frequently we do not sufficiently attend to the character and circumstances of that class of society in India from which these converts are chiefly drawn; and consider what temptations those men, who are ejected from all the regular *casts* of the country, have to deception, and to endeavour to cover their disgrace by a religious connexion with Europeans. This last consideration is unhappily too clearly illustrated by the large proportion of their few disciples over whose apostasy our pious missionaries are afterwards obliged to pour out their pathetic lamentations.

The causes of this ill success in converting these idolatrous nations is to be sought, not in any defect of qualifications in the missionaries, nor in any peculiar hostility of the present inhabitants of Asia or Africa to the gospel, but in the nature of things.

[These people have their minds preoccupied by their own superstitions, strengthened by all the habits of education, and by that powerful influence which sympathy with public opinion in the country in which men have been born and educated naturally possesses over the heart and the whole turn of thinking. The ideas which christianity presents to them are so entirely dissimilar to all that hitherto have ever entered their understanding concerning the divine nature, and the relations of God to the universe, and especially to a guilty world; that, in order to comprehend even its elementary principles, it would be necessary to submit to a long previous course of instruction. To pass from paganism to christianity is passing into a new world of ideas. But what motives could they have to submit to such a discipline in order eventually to understand a religion of which, at present, they can comprehend nothing but that it is destined to overturn all the opinions in which they have been nursed, and to destroy all the objects of their veneration? Would they not rather be disposed

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to reject it instantly, without examination? To engage them to yield up their minds to the cultivation of the missionaries, and so far, to lay aside original prepossessions, and to break down and alter the whole mould and habit which their souls have taken from the religion, and manners, and public sentiment of their country, as candidly to receive missionary instructions, it is necessary that they should already entertain some apprehensions of the truth and importance of the christian system. That is, they must first voluntarily submit to a previous culture before they can be brought to understand the religion; and some understanding of it, at least of its excellence and importance, must already have entered their minds to induce them to submit to this discipline. Here is a contradiction which will always present almost insuperable difficulties against the propagation of the christian religion through pagan nations by the mere force of reason, and the arts of human persuasion, unaided by a miraculous power from heaven. If to this we add their antipathies against a new religion so strict in its moral precepts, their jealousies of a religion offered to them by strangers, their abhorrence, perhaps their horror, of a religion which is blasphemy against their gods, their contempt of a religion which addresses them in a lan-

guage that must appear to them barbarous, and finally, the vicious manners of the European christians in India, whose only pursuits are war and commerce, and who display before the natives no other passions but those of ambition and avarice, the want of success in our missionaries, though preaching the purest and most excellent system in the world, both of divine and moral truth, cannot be accounted strange.

To produce any great and immediate revolution in religion among these nations would require some striking displays of a divine power, such as that which accompanied the apostles, to be exhibited to their senses, in order to arrest their attention, and fix it profoundly on the truths of the gospel as a message sent to them from God. It would require the authority of miracles to suspend those prepossessions which oppose, and darken, to their minds, the light of divine truth; and to produce a certain submission of heart to doctrines which they are not yet prepared fully to understand, such as children pay to the precepts of a venerable parent before the maturity of the mind enables them perfectly to perceive all the reasonableness of the principles which have been instilled into them, and of the discipline to which they have been subjected. For these unenlightened na-

tions are, with regard to the doctrines of a pure and rational religion in the state of children: they must receive its doctrines, at first, on the ground of *authority*; of an authority that is believed to be divine; otherwise, for the reasons I have already stated, they will never receive them at all. It is after this, that, examining more particularly the grounds of their assent, they come to embrace them with an intelligent and rational conviction.

Will it be asked then, if missionary labours are entirely hopeless for the time to come, as hitherto they have unhappily been productive of little fruit? No: they may be preparing the way at a distance for great events which are still concealed in the designs of providence; they may be shooting some feeble lights like the first rays of the dawn into the mass of surrounding darkness: but, judging from past experience and the usual course of things, the true religion will not, probably, be introduced among those nations, and generally received, but in a very long series of time.

When a revelation is to be given to the world, we naturally expect that it should be accompanied by great and visible demonstrations of the power of God attending those heralds of his grace whom he has appointed to proclaim it to mankind. These

proofs of divine interposition, while they confirm the truth, are calculated to procure for it an eager reception, and to give it a rapid extension wherever its holy and heaven-assisted missionaries can come. But when once the doctrine has obtained a firm and extensive establishment, when the leaven is insinuated into the mass, its progress afterwards is left to the slow and gradual operation of natural causes under the direction of divine providence. And it will advance or decline in particular countries, like other improvements among mankind in consequence of certain providential preparations of the means. And chiefly through the influence, properly exerted, which civilized and polished nations possess over the barbarous and uncultivated, to insinuate among them their manners and opinions, their science and their arts. But there is little resemblance between changes thus produced, which require ages to bring them to perfection, and those sublime, rapid, and extensive revolutions, such as we have seen in the early progress of the gospel, which are accomplished by the immediate and miraculous operation of the Spirit of God.*

* Some pious persons, who have been accustomed to attribute something like miraculous influence to the operations of the Divine Spirit on the hearts of men even under the ordinary preaching of the gospel, may imagine that in these reflections, sufficient

While we possess, in the preceding reflections, such proofs, and, in the genuine history of modern missions, so many lamentable examples of the impotence of truth and reason alone to make a nation *change its gods*, its customs, and its worship, have we not, at the same time, a strong, though indirect demonstration of the miraculous powers with which the apostles, and primitive evangelists must have been endued? In the small success with which modern missions have been attended we see an evident proof that nothing less than miracles could have so suddenly overturned the throne of superstition, conquered the pride of science, and the haughtiness of power, and changed the hereditary customs, prejudices, and worship of so many nations.

consideration is not given to that internal agency of the Spirit accompanying the word, which, according to them, may often supersede the necessity of the natural means of instruction and conviction. These good men seem to think that the same extraordinary effects may follow the simple ministrations of the ordinary servants of Christ, produced by these internal miracles of grace upon the heart, which followed the truth confirmed by the open and sensible miracles of Christ and his apostles. If this were a just view of the Spirit's operations, the miracles of our Saviour would have been a useless appendage of the gospel. On the other hand, he never works independently on the natural order of means which he has established in the gospel, and in the constitution of human nature.

In order to account for the rapid propagation of the christian religion without having recourse to the assistance of miracles, some writers have supposed that the superior reasonableness of the moral system of the gospel above that of any of the popular institutions of paganism facilitated the success of the apostles. For, with all their objections against the mysteries of christianity, they are obliged to acknowledge the excellence of its moral code. On the other hand, I have no hesitancy in pronouncing that merely the reasonableness of a religion, or of any moral system, never procured it, in the first instance, an easy and general reception among the mass of mankind. If it has not been incorporated by education with their earliest habits of thinking, it must claim their obedience and belief on some higher authority than merely the conclusions of their own reason, in which they can repose little confidence. Of this all the ancient legislators and reformers of nations were so deeply convinced, that, where they had not visible and real miracles on which to establish the public religion, or to found those civil institutions by which they attempted to reduce a barbarous people to order, they were obliged to have recourse to a pretended intercourse with heaven. If reason alone were a competent instructor of the people, why had not the

✓ genuine principles of natural religion a more extensive diffusion among the populace of Greece? Why did the philosophers pronounce the people incapable of reasoning? And why were not the doctrines of their schools able to extirpate idolatry, or even to throw a plausible and decent veil over its absurdities and indecencies? If christianity prevailed in the first age by the force of its own reasonableness, why do we not see the same effects produced by it since miracles have ceased? Does it not still possess the same superiority over the dismal idolatry of Greenland, and the indecent rites of India, which it did over the gay and licentious superstitions of Greece and Rome?

Other writers have thought that they have found a reason of this extraordinary phenomenon in the general discredit into which the objects, and the rites of the pagan worship had fallen in that age. [Their auguries, their oracles, their shameful and immoral deities, it is said, were despised by their men of learning, and had begun to be a subject of ridicule to the common people; and christianity only came in to occupy the room which they had left vacant. A less happy conjecture, perhaps, could hardly have been framed. Incredulity, surely, is not a favourable soil for the reception and growth of a new religion. On the contrary, when men, in the pro-

gress of a sceptical philosophy, and of the dissolution of the public morals, come to disbelieve, and hold in contempt the religion in which they have been educated, they are then prone to confound all religions, and, along with their country's gods, to reject, even without examination, every new doctrine which pretends to be derived from heaven.

There are authors who think they have made a shrewd observation on human nature, and the liberal genius of ancient manners, when they ascribe the easy introduction of christianity into the Roman empire, to what has been, quaintly enough, called the *sociable spirit* of paganism.

The Greeks and Romans believing in the existence of local deities who presided over particular districts and regions of the earth, easily granted to foreigners the privilege of introducing their country gods into Athens and Rome, and performing towards them their country's rites, because it was imagined they would not be pleased with any other. It was never intended that these stranger gods should supplant the native deities of Greece and Italy. It was never conceived that the one could interfere with the other. This, however, could not be the ground of any favour shown to christianity. Its worship was exclusive. It could make no compromise with idola-

try. The doctrine of Christ, wherever it came, soon overthrew all the altars and temples of paganism, and expelled from their shrines all the shameful objects of an impure and monstrous worship. This, which is the natural genius, and the necessary tendency of the gospel, far from opening the way for its reception in those idolatrous nations, would at once arm against it all the power of the magistrates, all the interest of the priests, and all the fury of a bigoted and deluded people.

The causes, therefore, which have been assembled with so much pains in order to account, on natural principles, for the superior success of the apostles and first ministers of christianity above its modern missionaries, are evidently not sufficient to support the conclusions which have been attempted to be built upon them. The true cause of their astonishing success is, that, while the missionaries ~~can appeal~~ only to the testimony of history, and the ~~reasonable-~~ness and excellence of the doctrines which they preach, the apostles could appeal ~~also to their own~~ miracles, to the heavenly powers with which they were invested, and which spoke so strongly to the senses of mankind. These are the weapons with which the disciples of the Saviour subdued the earth to the dominion of the faith. Although destitute of

the advantages of science, and of that high and commanding eloquence which attracts the admiration of the world. Although inferior in these respects to the nations among whom they travelled preaching the gospel; and although they derived no influence from the splendour or power of their country, yet every thing yielded before them. How far superior to them in every human advantage are the present missionaries of our holy religion. Do they not possess incomparably higher degrees of science than the people to whom they are sent? And do they not go under the patronage of nations regarded in those distant countries with the greatest veneration for their vast ascendancy over the rest of mankind in arts, and in arms? But they are comparatively unsuccessful, because they do not carry with them, like the apostles, the ensigns of heaven; that is, *the demonstration of the Spirit in his miraculous power.**

* 1 Cor. II. 45. *For my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of man but the power God.* This passage appears to be in entire conformity with the preceding reflections in this lecture. The apostle, in his preaching, depended not for his success on the *enticing*, or *persuasive* power of human eloquence, but on the *demonstration* given to the truth by the *Spirit* of God, in the *miraculous power* with which His divine missionary was endued. That the faith of the converts to the gospel, from among the idola-

Experience then, and reason, both concur to demonstrate that, without the cooperation of miracles, the christian doctrine could not have made such rapid and extensive progress, as we have seen it do, through nations so various, so distant, and so opposite in their characters: and this astonishing progress, as has been before asserted, affords a strong confirmation of the reality of the miracles on which Christ founded his claim to be acknowledged as the Son of God, and the apostles to be received as messengers from heaven. *Believe me*, saith the Saviour, *for the works' sake*. Many of the most wise and judicious men esteem the argument drawn from this fact absolutely decisive of the question concerning the truth of christianity; and the most incredulous must confess that it creates a very powerful presumption in favour of the gospel history.

The writers, who suppose that the progress of christianity in the first age may be accounted for from natural causes alone, affect to compare it with the rapid extension of the mahometan imposture.

trous nations, might not stand in any reasonings of human science, as by no reasoning or eloquence will a nation ever change its gods and its religion, but in the *power of God*: in those proofs of omnipotence accompanying the apostles, which, wherever they are found, are the infallible seal of divine truth.

But if we enter into a fair and candid comparison of the two cases, the apparent parallelism between them will be found no longer to exist. We have already seen the mild and pacific means by which christianity extended her gentle sway over the world. The establishment of mahometanism was effected entirely by the power of the sword; and its rapid extension and its furious course is no more surprising than the conquests of Zenghis, or of Timur, or than any of those sudden and violent revolutions which have so often changed the face of Asia, in different ages. The progress of christianity has no parallel in universal history; that of the koran has, unfortunately, too many examples. For it is as easy to carry a new religion among an ignorant people on the point of the sword, as a new code of civil and political legislation.*

* I doubt not but the leaders of the French revolution, if they had had skill and unanimity enough to pursue their own plans, could as easily have established the worship of their goddess of reason as their new republic. Nothing but the force of arms directed by their fanaticism, and their exterminating spirit, could have effected either. And if Bonaparte had been a bloody minded enthusiast, as he is a skilful warrior and sagacious politician, he could have effected both. There was a time when the madness of the French nation could have had any system of impiety imposed upon them by the bloody atrocity of a predominant faction.

Mahomet did not pretend to found his system upon miracles. He understood human nature too well. He knew that no unreal pretence to miraculous powers can be long supported, when their operations, like those of Moses and of Christ, are exposed to public view. It was not till several centuries after his death that any such powers were ascribed to him by his followers, when Abulfeda and Al-Jannabi invented for him some legendary prodigies.* He rested the proof of his divine mission exclusively on the excellence of the koran, which, his disciples, after him, say, is the most perfect book, both in its matter and its style, that ever was written. "Is it not sufficient, says he, that we have sent down the book of the koran to be read unto them?" Not being able to appeal to miracles he had no other means to propagate his religion but the sword. For I have already shown that the establishment of a new religion, like that of the christian, over various, distant, and hostile nations merely by the powers of reasoning and persuasion, without the aid of miracles, is ut-

* These men lived, one in the seventh, the other in the ninth century of the mahometan era. And their object seems to have been merely to provide their religion with some prodigies to oppose to the christian miracles; of the want of which its doctors were often sensible in their controversies with the christians.

terly impossible. And to the pretended prophet of Arabia his own experience, in the beginning of his enterprise, forcibly demonstrated this truth. Before he had acquired the command of an army, and while he was obliged to rely only on the resources of his own mind, his success was extremely inconsiderable; and his party, expelled from his native city, was on the point of perishing, or becoming nothing but a band of Arabian banditti plundering the desert.

Mahomet was nearly connected with the most powerful and wealthy families in Mecca. And, although possessing, from this circumstance, that influence in the city, which is naturally attached to rank and power in the minds of the multitude, especially in such a country as Arabia, in which all the members of the respective tribes are connected among themselves by the ties of blood, and each individual is prompted, by a kind of clanish pride, to support the pretensions of the heads of the family, yet, in the first three years of his ministry he could persuade not more than fourteen persons to join themselves to his party. In seven years he could still number only eighty-three followers, whom he gained by pretending to the pagan Arabs, who gloried in being descended from Ishmael and Abraham, that the koran contained the genuine religion of these

great patriarchs of their nation, and by declaring to some degenerate christians and Jews in Mecca, that it was the doctrine of Christ and of Moses purified from the corruptions which time had introduced into it.

This was too tedious and uncertain a process for the ardour of his mind; and he adopted a discipline calculated to make his followers soldiers, as well as believers. Such a project being perfectly congenial with the martial and plundering spirit of the Arabs, he was enabled, though expelled from Mecca, to collect at length a considerable band in the desert. Violent political dissensions happened, at that time, to arise in Medina; and he, by intrigue, procured himself, with his troops, to be invited into the city to quell the public disorders. He reduced the state to tranquillity, but, at the same time, subjected it to his own power. Being now in possession of a fortified capital, of magazines, of a place of arms, and of a competent military force, he was enabled to attack, in succession, the small tribes in his vicinity, who had no union or concert among themselves, and to subdue them to his dominion, and his faith. Augmenting his power by degrees, he continued daily to extend his victories, and to receive new revela-

tions, till, at last, he was enabled to enslave and convert the whole east.

After Mahomet gained possession of Medina, there is nothing mysterious in the progress of islamism. He had the address, and the courage to raise the enthusiasm, and the military ardour of his generals, and his armies to the highest pitch; and he overran Asia with the same facility with which it had so often before been subdued by other conquerors. He carried the sword in one hand and the koran in the other, and offered to the vanquished the choice only of islamism, or death.*

The rapid progress, therefore, of the doctrine of Mahomet, and its establishment over all the east, in so short a period, involves no causes which are not perfectly natural, and obviously within the sphere of human agency. They do not, in the least, invalidate the proofs which have been already given of the miraculous power of heaven continually accompanying

* To the christians he was more lenient than to the pagans and idolaters, probably because he foresaw the difficulty of subduing or exterminating a race of men whose character it is to adhere more firmly to their religion in proportion to the severity of the persecutions which assail it. To them he gave another alternative, that of paying tribute. Addressing them in a style at once contemptuous and enraged: "You know your option; says he, the koran, tribute, or the sword." Gibbon. vol. 9. p. 337.

the Saviour and his apostles in the rapid extension of the gospel. There is no point of resemblance between the progress of the one and of the other, except in their rapidity. But when we come to examine minutely into the causes of this in each, the resemblance, which seemed to strike us at the first view, immediately vanishes. As long as the impostor employed only the powers of persuasion, and addressed himself simply to the understandings of men, which were the sole means which could be applied by the first ministers of christianity, if we deny them the power of miracles, or, as long as he had recourse merely to the arts of deception, we find him, after fourteen years of labour and knavery, hardly advanced a single step in his career. But, when he changed his system to violence and force, his troops performed the rest.

If it is easy to propagate a new religion by pretences to a miraculous power which is not real, it is surprising that the artful impostor of Asia should not have resorted to so powerful an engine in the commencement of his course. Such pretences might have saved him those scenes of cruelty and carnage which every where marked the progress of his religion. Or, if he was ambitious of the command of armies, and of imperial sway, they might have great-

ly facilitated the entrance of this military prophet upon his bloody mission. And is it not surprising that the facile pretence of miracles, if, indeed, it be so easy to be maintained, has not been more frequently resorted to by other impostors? On the contrary, such pretences have been very rare,* and supported only by a few solitary and ambiguous examples, the fallacy of which shall afterwards be pointed out; but no religion has ever claimed to be founded on plain, public, and palpable miracles, openly addressed to the senses, and offered to the scrupulous examination of mankind, but those of Moses and of Christ. A proof this of no inconsiderable weight, since impostures of various kinds have ever existed in the world, that no claim to a divine mission can be supported on the ground of fictitious miracles.

* I do not mean by miracles such feats as were performed in the recesses of pagan temples by the arts of priests operating on the terrified imagination of solitary individuals, such as are represented to have taken place in the temple and cave of Trophœus; nor do I mean such tales as that of Mahomet's nocturnal flight to heaven, or of Numa's communications with the goddess Egeria, events which were said to happen to the legislator and the prophet in secret; but open, and public actions, palpable to the senses, and exposed, without concealment or disguise, to the examination of all men, in which the ordinary laws of nature, are evidently altered or suspended in their operation.

LECTURE VII.

The pretence of Credulity alleged against those who embraced the Gospel. Embraced by the learned as well as the vulgar. Impostors among the Heathen.

IT is often alleged by those who are unfriendly to the christian revelation, that the credulity of mankind, and their love of the marvellous, is sufficient to account for the progress of the gospel, and the general belief of its miracles. "The weakness of illiterate followers, they say, would greedily swallow the pretended wonders of their Master. They could easily raise the wonder-loving spirit of their hearers, who would be ready, without inquiry, either to admit their own pretences to a miraculous power, or to believe the fabled miracles of Christ." By a few such general sneers they save themselves the trouble of examining the evidences of the christian revelation, and cast off from their consciences the irksome authority of the christian law.

It is true the ignorant in all countries are credulous; and, in consequence of this tendency of mind,

they abound in narrations of silly wonders. But is there, therefore, nothing really wonderful in the providence of God over the world, or in the dispensation, of his mercy to mankind? Certainly, every candid reader will confess that the miracles of the gospel ought not to be compared with those ridiculous and local prodigies recited in every district of every country by the vulgar; and which are evidently the effect of superstitious weakness, or an enthusiastic fervor of mind. The writings of the evangelists and apostles exhibit no marks of that imbecility in their mental powers which would render them liable to be easily imposed upon by lying wonders, and false appearances. If we do not admit that they were enlightened by the Spirit of God, in which case no deception could be suspected, the excellence of their moral system, the sublimity of their theological doctrines, so superior to the philosophy of their age, and the grandeur of the views which they have opened on the universe, so far above whatever had been before conceived by the human mind in any age, demonstrate that they must have been men of the soundest judgments, and the strongest intellectual faculties, on which no fraud could have been practised, no attempted imposition could have succeeded.*

* If their system of theology and morals was their own, cer-

That they were not parties to any scheme of imposture their wisdom, their piety, their self-denials, their arduous labours, their continual sufferings, and, finally, their painful, various, and voluntary deaths in the cause of Christ, declare with a conviction which, I think, must be irresistible to a mind that considers the subject with fairness and impartiality.

I observe, in the next place, that their writings exhibit as few characters of enthusiasm as of weakness. Their historical narrations are given with a dignified simplicity, their moral instructions, in a clear and judicious train of reasoning enforced with temperate warmth. We find in them none of those wild fervors, and ridiculous extravagancies which seem inseparable from the spirit of enthusiasm. They exhibit all the proofs, which writing and conduct can manifest, of the most undesigning sincerity; and speak of the most astonishing displays of divine power in the miracles of their Master, and their own, in a strain of calm and temperate narration which surprises us not less than the actions themselves. They speak like men who were not only *witnesses* of the miracles of

tainly this conclusion is very fairly drawn. If it was derived to them, it could be from no other source but heaven; for with philosophers and sages, and all the science of the world they were wholly unacquainted.

Jesus, but were *conscious* of the same powers in themselves, and were *familiar with the works of omnipotence*. Neither enthusiasm, then, which deceives itself, nor imposture, which endeavours to deceive others, nor a weak facility of believing without evidence, can justly be imputed to the apostles. Can we then find a more satisfactory reason of the universal belief of the miracles of the gospel in the credulity of the *world*?

The populace are prone to listen with a certain idle curiosity, and to circulate with eagerness among themselves marvellous tales when they produce no other effect than agitating, and giving play to their natural love of wonder. But, when they are to affect any great interest; when the belief of them is conjoined with the sacrifice of their passions, their pleasures, their national customs, their honour, or their fortune, the case is entirely reversed: then they are received with distrust, and scrutinized with rigour. If, in dark and ignorant ages, the people are disposed to listen to fables which seem to spring out of the genius of their religion, and are intended only to strengthen their favourite superstition, they would not surely lend the same easy faith to prodigies, real or pretended, which should be alleged only to overturn whatever was held most sacred among them. Be-

sides, wherever the gospel came, the native superstitions of the people had preoccupied their minds. All their credulity was already enlisted in opposition to the doctrine, the history, and the miracles of Christ. And in proportion to their ignorance, was the violence with which they were attached to silly and incongruous fables, which were more adapted to the grossness of their minds than the pure and spiritual theology and morality of the gospel.

But, whatever declamations men may think proper to make on the credulity of the vulgar, the belief of the christian revelation was not confined to this class of society. It early numbered among its disciples magistrates, senators, orators, and philosophers of the highest distinction for learning and eloquence; men who examined the claims of the religion with the most painful diligence, and the most accurate scrutiny; men who reluctantly yielded the haughtiness of office, the vanity of national superiority, the pride of talents and of learning, to the force of truth, and the demonstrations of a divine power accompanying Christ and his apostles. Not to speak of Joseph of Arimathea, one of the sanhedrim of the Jews, on whose history some obscurity rests, it is certain that Dionysius, a member of the celebrated Areopagus of Athens, and Flavius Clemens, a sena-

tor of Rome, suffered martyrdom for Christ in the very first age. Arnobius, an early historian of the church, assures us that men of the finest talents and the greatest learning, orators, grammarians, rhetoricians, lawyers, physicians, philosophers, abandoning their former opinions, and the systems to which they had been attached by education, and the habits of a philosophical life, now reposed their minds only on the truth of the gospel. The writings, and even the names of great numbers of men of letters have not come down to us. A few only, out of multitudes, who, we are assured, were no way inferior to them, and not inferior to the wisest men of the period in which they lived, have survived to our age.* And if we were to select a philosopher of that time most distinguished for the splendour of his talents, the acuteness of his genius, and the vast extent of his erudition, it would be Origen, with whom none of the learned men of his time deserves to be named as a rival.

* It will be sufficient to name the two Dionysii, one of Athens, the other of Alexandria, Quadratus, Aristides, Athenagoras, Clemens, Anatolius, without mentioning the crowd of the fathers who, redeemed from paganism and the errors of the heathen philosophy, embraced the doctrine of Christ with zeal, as the repose and hope of their souls. Having the strongest motives to examine into the foundations of that new and divine philosophy, their nearness to the events recorded in the sacred history afforded them the amplest means of ascertaining their truth.

Is it to be presumed, then, that men of their character, and attainments in science, enjoying, as they did, the means of the most minute and accurate inquiry, would receive on slight evidence, or, indeed, would embrace, without the most rigorous examination, a new religion which overturned, and treated as folly all their ancient principles of philosophy? Is there a shadow of probability that such men would enlist themselves as disciples, and champions of this religion, without the most satisfactory evidence of the divine authority, on which it rested, and the deepest conviction of its infinite importance to mankind, when its first effect was to humble the pride of human science, on which they had promised themselves to build their glory; when instead of being the proud teachers of a proud philosophy, it turned them back to be the self-denied pupils of unlearned Jews, and a crucified Saviour; and above all, when it exposed them to such extreme sufferings as no partial conviction, no doubtful faith, and no hasty and immature opinions, could ever have enabled them to endure? Not credulity, surely, but conviction established upon the most solid basis could have sustained them under the operation of those severe and fiery tests of their faith to which it was constantly subjected. That I may place this point in as strong

a light as possible, let me quote here a passage from the pious and elegant Addison, in which it is presented to us with equal force of thought and beauty of expression: "I cannot help regarding as a standing miracle, says he, that amazing, and supernatural courage, or patience, shown by innumerable multitudes of martyrs in those slow and painful torments that were inflicted on them. I cannot conceive a man placed in the burning chair at Lyons, amid the insults and mockeries of a crowded amphitheatre, and still keeping his seat; or stretched upon a grate of iron over coals of fire, and breathing out his soul among the exquisite sufferings of such a tedious execution, rather than renounce his religion, or blaspheme his Saviour. Such trials seem to me above the strength of human nature, and able to overbear duty, reason, faith, conviction, nay, and the most absolute certainty of a future state. Humanity, unassisted in an extraordinary manner, must have shaken off the present pressure, and delivered itself out of such a dreadful distress by any means which could have been suggested to it. We can easily imagine that many persons, in so good a cause might have laid down their lives at the gibbet, the stake, or the block: but, to expire leisurely among the most exquisite tortures, when they might come out of them even by

a mental reservation, or a hypocrisy which was not without the possibility of being followed by repentance and forgiveness, has something in it so far beyond the force and natural strength of mortals, that one cannot but think there was some miraculous power to support the sufferer." Although we should not think with Mr. Addison, that any divine aid which might be strictly called *miraculous*, was communicated to these pious sufferers, yet must we admit that nothing short of the clearest and strongest conviction of the truth of the gospel and its miracles; nothing but the firmest persuasion that Christ alone had *the words of eternal life*, could have induced them to expose themselves to such dangers, or supported them in enduring such excruciating torments. Is it possible that philosophic men, whatever may be supposed of the vulgar class of martyrs, could have voluntarily gone to death surrounded with so many terrors, if their minds had not been encouraged, animated, and supported by the most complete conviction, founded on the strongest and most rational evidence, that the doctrines which they had embraced, and the miracles which they beheld, were *the wisdom of God, and the power of God*? The least doubtfulness, the smallest apprehension that they had not thoroughly examined the proofs of that holy religion,

to which they were about to offer up their lives amidst such a complication of horrors, must have shaken the constancy of their souls. But, when we see that no dangers can move them, and that, in the midst of their sufferings, they preserve their serenity and firmness unaltered, except when it rises to exultation and triumph, such matchless and divine heroism can, surely, never be the result of a weak credulity. In such tremendous conflicts, integrity and truth alone can sustain the heart.*

One important consideration in the change of those learned men, who embraced christianity in the primitive age, deserves to be particularly remarked: they declare that it was not merely the purity and perfection of the christian faith, which originally produced their conversion from paganism and philosophy, but the miracles which they saw performed by the apostles and apostolic men, which carried with them unequivocal demonstrations of a divine

* No where do we see mankind willing to make great sacrifices to attest their belief of those fables which have been invented to amuse or impose on their credulity. And such fables are always mingled with silly and ridiculous circumstances, such as appear in the histories of the heathen gods, the feats ascribed to witchcraft, the forgeries of monks, and the idle tales of popular rumour or superstition, which expose them to contempt with all sensible men, and easily discriminate them from the simple, consistent, and dignified histories of the gospel.

power attending their doctrine, and without which they would probably never have turned their minds to an examination of its excellence.

Some writers have unaccountably pretended that the testimony of the christian fathers to the miracles of the gospel ought not to be regarded as possessing any weight in the scale of evidence by which we estimate its truth, because it is the testimony of friends in favour of their own system. But what made them christians? What created their attachment to the christian doctrine? Was it not the miracles which they beheld? They were before ighorant of its true nature; they were hostile to its spirit, to the name of its Author, and to his nation. But they sacrificed their prejudices, but they became disciples of a religion they had hated and despised, and for the profession of it they exposed themselves to the most terrible deaths. Their conversion, then, is precisely that which gives the greatest force to their testimony.

To support the objection against the reality of miracles, which is founded on the credulity of mankind, we are referred to various impostures which, at different periods, have obtained a temporary credit and success in the world. On a few of those which have been most confidently opposed to the *mighty works* performed by our Saviour and his apostles, I shall, after offering to your consideration two pre-

liminary remarks, make several observations with the view of discriminating them from the real operations of a divine power. The first remark which I offer is, that, if pretences to a peculiar intercourse with heaven have been attempted to be maintained by the additional pretence to miraculous powers, it is, at least, a proof of the general persuasion of mankind, that miracles form the proper evidence of a divine mission. If, therefore, a real messenger from heaven should ever appear in the world, it is a most natural and reasonable expectation that he should be invested with an extraordinary control over the common operations of nature as the seal of his prophetic character. But because there have been religious impostors, are there, therefore, no true prophets? Because there are empirics in every liberal profession, are there no certain principles of science? This can be the conclusion only of ignorance or prejudice. Empiricism in religion, or in art, should not make us deny the existence of truth in both, but only render us more careful and scrupulous in examining the pretensions of those who come to us as instructors in either.

I remark, in the next place, that, between the miracles of the holy scriptures, and those mysterious incantations, and ambiguous wonders, performed

by the priests, and magicians of paganism, which certain writers have affected to bring into competition with them, there are strong and marked distinctions which ought to be particularly observed, and which are sufficient to demonstrate the one to be from heaven, the other to be only the spurious growth of human artifice and corruption.

These pretended prodigies were commonly exhibited in some sequestered place where the operators had the opportunity of preparing whatever means of deception were necessary for imposing on the senses. Often they were exhibited in the recesses of their temples in the midst of glooms rendered awful by superstition, and of fearful images presented to an imagination already almost crazed by terror, which deprived the miserable subject of their art of all power of judging rationally of the scenes before him. Nothing was done openly and in public, and exposed to the fair and dispassionate examination of the senses of all men. Their prodigies were works of darkness, secluded from the observation of the world, performed only on rare occasions, and after much artful preparation.* The miracles of our blessed

* This was the case in several places in Greece, but particularly in the temple and cave of Trophonius, which has been mentioned before. An interesting account of some of the scenes of

Saviour, on the other hand, were the ordinary and familiar actions of his life. Nothing, as he says himself, was *done in secret*. But all his wonderful works were performed on such subjects as no sleight of hand, no apparatus for deceiving the senses could reach; such as healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind, restoring the paralytic to their natural powers, assuaging the winds and the waves, and raising the dead. Their wonders were employed to amuse the popular credulity, and to confirm among the ignorant an old superstition by the strange narrations which the dupes of the imposture afterwards disseminated among the people. They were followed by no other consequence. But the works of Jesus Christ, by powerfully seizing on the human mind, have been followed by the most important revolution which has ever taken place in the moral world.*

imposture exhibited in that celebrated cavern of superstition will be found in the travels of Anacharsis the younger through Greece, by the Abbè Barthelemy, chap. 34th.

* Other discriminating differences between the divine works of the Saviour, and the frivolous or extravagant operations of imposture shall be pointed out in the progress of these illustrations.

LECTURE VIII.

Of demoniacal Miracles, and the supposed powers of Demons.

THE pretended prodigies which, in various countries, have been exhibited by magicians and sorcerers, and men skilled in the arts of imposture, have, by the enemies of the christian revelation, been set in opposition to the miracles of our Saviour, as if they were entitled to equal authority. By this artifice, placing imposture and truth on the same ground, they endeavour to weaken, and at length to destroy the influence of the latter over the human mind. The scriptures, they say, place them on an equal footing by ascribing the works of both to supernatural causes. For, if they are supernatural, by what criterion shall we distinguish the demoniacal from the divine? Are we not justifiable, then, in imputing them all equally to imposture? A just subject of regret it is that many christian writers have given too much countenance to this species of objection, by attributing to demons and malignant spirits, the power of working miracles,

and the prescient faculty of predicting future events. From the sacred scriptures, say these writers, we learn the existence of such spirits. And if such powerful beings exist, and have any intercourse with men, is it not reasonable to believe that they must, in many instances, be able to change the ordinary and regular course of nature, and to exhibit prodigies calculated to terrify, to injure, and deceive mankind?

In order to remove the foundation of this objection, in which unbelievers have triumphed, and which they have conceived to be greatly strengthened by the concessions of christians, I shall endeavour to demonstrate that, whatever surprising feats, cunning and dexterous men may exhibit, by the sleights of legerdemain, or other arts, to mislead the judgment, or deceive the senses of the ignorant; yet no being, but God only, possesses the power of operating a real miracle. Miracles are exclusively reserved to be the proofs of divine revelation, and can never be produced but by the best of beings, for the most wise and beneficent ends. The ascription of supernatural powers over the established order of the universe in any of its departments, to infernal or demoniacal agents, is equally contrary to reason, to experience, and to the sacred scriptures, which, however, have

been unhappily misinterpreted to support this dangerous error.

Appealing to reason, is it probable that God, the father of his rational creatures, will ever suffer them to be exposed to irremediable deception with regard to their duty, and their eternal interests, by beings who rejoice only in the misery of mankind, and are not less his enemies than theirs? And would not that deception be irremediable wherein evil spirits should be able to confirm their impious suggestions by the same evidence, which accompanies evangelic truth, or to give forth their oracular responses with prophetic certainty? Besides, every just and rational idea of *creation* resists the pernicious doctrine of demoniacal interference in the order of the world. If the system of nature has been created by infinite power, and arranged with infinite wisdom and goodness, conclusions which necessarily result from the perfection of the Deity, and if the laws of goodness and wisdom are as immutable as those of necessity, it is manifestly unreasonable to suppose that any inferior, and much more that any malevolent power, will ever be permitted to control, or alter its established course. It is unreasonable to believe that the Creator himself will ever change or control the laws which he has established in the universe, except for

ends as wise and benevolent as those for which they were originally ordained. If it be conceded that evil demons possess the power of working miracles, or changing in any degree the course of nature, what means have frail mortals of guarding themselves from the deepest injuries, and the most fatal delusions? By what principle shall they certainly distinguish the works of inferior, and even malignant spirits from those of the Deity himself? Will it be said, as the divines to whom I refer have said, that the goodness of the doctrine, and its tendency to promote holiness of life, will discriminate the divine works which are wrought to confirm it, from all the operations of evil spirits? But, is not this confounding all ideas? The miracle is pleaded, in the first place, to confirm the divine authority of the doctrine; and again we appeal to the doctrine to establish the authenticity of the miracle.

Another, and irrefutable argument against this criterion of a true miracle results from that great diversity of judgment often formed by the wisest men concerning the moral tendencies of particular doctrines. The imperfection and ambiguity of language, or the different aspects in which the same idea is presented to different minds, frequently lead to the

most various conclusions.* Is the common mass of mankind, then, competent to judge of the excellence and divine perfection of doctrines by the powers of their own reason, and thence to deduce the divinity of the miracles which are performed to confirm them? And if they were competent to form an accurate judgment on this subject, and perfectly to distinguish those truths which are worthy of God, from such as might be derived from any other source, wherein would consist the necessity of miracles at all?

To the argument that the power of working miracles residing in evil demons would subject mankind to necessary and irremediable deception; or entirely destroy the utility of this species of evidence for divine revelation, from the impossibility of accurately distinguishing their works from those of the Almighty, the writers, to whom I have referred, reply, that God will always counteract the powers of evil spirits by enabling his servants to perform miracles greater, or more numerous than theirs. This is surely most gratuitously said: for where have we the case stated, or the promise made? Is it only to be presumed from the goodness of our heavenly Father,

* What numerous volumes have been written by philosophers of different schools, and divines of different sects, impeaching the moral tendency of the principles of their opponents.

who will not suffer his creatures to be deceived in a point so essential to their duty, and their happiness? But is not this reason still stronger for denying any miraculous powers to infernal spirits? If they possess the powers, what can save the infirmity of unhappy mortals from the most fatal delusions? Greater miracles performed by a prophet of the Most High? But must Elijah always be present amidst the prophets of Baal when they are deceiving the people? or Moses be always ready to counteract the magicians of Pharaoh while they are employing their pernicious arts to confirm the monarch at once in his pride and his impiety? And if the prophets of Baal, or the magicians of Egypt really possessed miraculous powers, how could the infatuated prince, or the deluded people certainly know that Moses and Elijah overcame them by the word of the only living and true God, and not rather by the aid of some more powerful demon? How could they be sure that they were not, as Pliny says of Moses, only the most famous of magicians? But, when it is laid down as a principle that no power except that of God alone, who has given existence to the universe, and fixed its wise and stable order, can ever miraculously sur-

* Plin. Nat. Hist. book 30. ch. 2.

pend its action or invert its order, we enjoy then the most complete safeguard against the dangers of imposture. Wherever a clear and unequivocal miracle is proved to have taken place, there we may be sure that God has spoken.*

But if we admit the existence of evil and powerful spirits, of which the scriptures have left us no room to doubt, may not they, without inverting the order of nature, or reversing its laws, but merely in consequence of their invisibility, exhibit miraculous appearances to the senses? Would not the rolling of a stone by an invisible agent have all the effect of a miracle? I answer that, whatever *spiritual* powers†

* Our blessed Saviour himself thus states the evidence of his own divine mission: *The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me.* Miracles were the seal of heaven impressed upon his commission. On the exhibition of these alone he demanded their obedience and faith: *If I do not the works of my Father believe me not. If I had not done among them works which no other man did, they had not had sin.* Why? Because miracles are the undoubted seal of God; which none can impress on any false or pretended commission. For no being but God can operate a real miracle. And wherever this infallible sign of divine power appears, it commands implicit obedience; for then the unbelieving and disobedient *have no more cloak for their sin.*

† Manifested by the temptations which they often suggest to the human mind. But I am inclined to believe that, for any created *spirit* to exercise any power over the visible and material system of the universe, except where the power is immediately

such beings may possess within that spiritual sphere assigned by the Creator for their operations in the order of the universe, it is utterly improbable that they are permitted to act out of their own sphere, and to usurp the powers of that material system appointed by him for the residence and operations of men.* It is still more improbable, when we consider that spirits of their malignant nature, could use such permission only to the injury of the weakest and most defenceless of the creatures of God, who are here, by his grace, on their probation for eternity. If reason resists the interference of these spiritual and invisible agents, it is absolutely refuted by experience. For, who has ever witnessed these prodigies? We cannot rank among the facts of experience those marvellous, and often ridiculous tales, the offspring of imposture, or of timidity and stupid wonder, with which the early histories of all nations have

and miraculously imparted by God, such spirit must be constitutionally united to an organized body adapted to such operations, as is the case with the human soul.

* The supposition on which this objection turns, if admitted, would absolutely destroy the foundations of all natural science. We determine the laws of nature, as far as they are discoverable by us, by attending to physical facts, and observing the regular and constant connexion of effects with their causes. But what uniformity would there be in effects if any spiritual and invisible agents might disturb this order at pleasure?

abounded, and which are continually retailed in the ignorant circles of society. In proportion as science has been cultivated and society improved, they have always disappeared. But, if such prodigies were really performed by invisible spirits, and were the effects of powers naturally inherent in them, would they be confined to any age, or any class of society? Must they not be the subjects of our frequent, not to say constant observation? The argument from *experience*, which is false when applied to real miracles,* is decisive against all supposed demoniacal prodigies. Miracles, from their nature and design, can be interposed but rarely in the course of human events; and only when God has seen it necessary to make a new annunciation of his will to the world.† When this case happens, it is of so high and peculiar a nature, that our experience of the usual train of causes and effects in the physical order of things cannot be considered as an infallible measure of the credibility of those extraordinary acts of omnipotence by which it may please God to authenticate the mission of his

* See Lecture III.

† Miracles that should frequently occur would lose their character of miracles; that is, of inversions of the laws of nature made by the immediate power of God. They would be regarded only as natural phenomena, the causes of which have not yet been discovered by philosophers.

servants whom he sends forth to promulge the law of his grace to mankind. But if evil demons possessed any inherent powers, essential to their nature, over the course of the world, would they not be as free in the exercise of these powers as men are in the use of the natural faculties of their bodies, and their minds. In this case the train of events would be constantly thrown into disorder by them, and men continually disturbed by their mad freaks. If such a power existed, our own experience would furnish the continual proofs of its reality; and demoniacal prodigies would be as familiar events as the criminal achievements of bold and wicked men. Experience points out to us the regular course of nature. And if we never see it changed by the influence of preternatural causes, it is contrary to every principle of sound reason to admit the existence of demoniacal miracles. To say that God, in the ordinary tenor of providence, restrains them in the exercise of powers which are essential to them, when it is obvious that he does not restrain evil men in the use of their faculties, is a mere, unsupported hypothesis, inconsistent with the analogy of nature. And to say, that he occasionally only permits to them the free use of their natural activity, or invests them with supernatural

powers, for the purpose of injuring, alarming, or deceiving mankind, is impious.

As reason and experience most plainly contradict the idea of any miraculous power existing in evil spirits, or exercised by them over this material system, the exclusive habitation, and sphere of man, except by the immediate authority and command of God; let us examine if the holy scriptures afford, as has been alleged by many grave and respectable writers, any support to a notion which appears to me to impair, or even to destroy that evidence on which they themselves claim our belief.

An opinion was very generally entertained by the christian fathers, that the objects of the pagan idolatry were infernal spirits, who were supposed to animate the idols in their temples, to give responses in their oracles, and to perform many prodigies in the recesses of their sanctuaries. Through veneration for these pious men, the opinion has been maintained by many excellent writers in the church till our time. It was evidently embraced by those eminent scholars and divines who formed the translation of the scriptures which we use. Hence a tincture favourable to this doctrine is often given to their language, and the terms expressive of the objects of heathen worship, interpreted in the septuagint version by *dai-*

mones, or demons, are, in our translation, rendered *devils*. This circumstance has given to the term *demon* in our tongue a signification entirely different from that which the original *δαίμων* conveyed to a Greek, and has shed through the sacred writings an appearance of their favouring diabolical agency in the affairs of men, to an extent far beyond their real meaning. That we may precisely ascertain the import of this, and of other related terms in the original tongues, it will be necessary to turn back your view for a moment to the origin of pagan idolatry.

The first objects which attracted the religious homage of mankind after they had lost the knowledge of the true God, were those splendid bodies that illuminate the heavens, the sun, the moon, and the stars, which, seizing on the principle of admiration in ignorant men, were soon raised by them to the rank of divinities. Gratitude to national benefactors, or veneration for ancestors who had been distinguished for illustrious virtues, or achievements, would raise them to the next seats in heaven. Accordingly, the pagan gods were divided into two classes; the first were the *natural gods*, consisting of those glorious celestial orbs supposed to preside over the genial powers of nature, which the imagination of an ignorant and superstitious people endued with

life, and invested with the attributes of divinity. The second, which were properly deified men, were only the *manes* of their heroes, and other illustrious personages, raised by their grateful or admiring votaries, after their death, to a middle rank between human nature, and the *great gods*. But being regarded as mediators between men and the celestial deities, they became at length almost exclusively the objects of pagan worship. These were the *Δαιμόνες*, or demons of the Greeks.* Cicero, Plutarch, Pliny, and other writers, both Greek and Roman, acknowledge that the immediate objects of worship in their temples, were these *demons* or deified men.† Keep-

* This term among the Greeks is equivalent to the Hebrew *Baalim*, which was a general denomination for the hero-gods of the east. The learned Joseph Mede supposes that this name was derived from Bel, Belus, or Baal, king of Babylon, who, being the greatest prince of the east, and the first of deified mortals, gave his name to all future deified princes, heroes, or illustrious men, as the name of Cæsar became a title of imperial dignity to all future emperors, not only of Rome, but of nations which have sprung into existence since the decline of Rome.

† In order to do honour to these *demon* or *hero-gods*, they often gave their names to the *great*, or *celestial* deities, and again the names of these celestial deities to their favourite heroes. And blending the real or fabulous history of the former, with the symbolical theogony of the latter, infinite, and almost inextricable confusion has been introduced into the pagan mythology, in consequence of this absurd mixture of fable with truth, and of the powers and properties of nature, symbolized in their worship, with the actions and vices of men.

ing this in mind we shall obtain the true meaning of this term in the septuagint version, and of various terms in the Hebrew original which our translators of the scriptures, from the prepossessions already mentioned, have every where rendered *devils*, *evil* or *familiar spirits*. Thus may we rescue from abuse many passages in the sacred writings, which have been perverted to the purposes of superstition, and to give a most unreasonable extension to the influence of infernal spirits in the affairs of men. Certainly the heathens never imagined; nor can sound reason ever believe that devils were either their *natural*, or their *hero-gods*, or that they animated the statues which were the representatives of those imaginary deities.

Is it to be supposed, then, that the holy scriptures ascribe any miraculous agency, or any prophetic prescience, to dead men, or even to these splendid but inanimate portions of the natural system? The presumption would be, antecedently to an examination of the writings themselves, that they do not acknowledge any power in objects which nothing but the error and corruption of mankind could ever have raised to the rank of divinities. This most reasonable presumption is confirmed by a diligent attention to the whole strain of scripture. The sacred writers most explicitly pronounce the gods of the heathen to

be utterly devoid of power, of foreknowledge, and even of intelligence. *All the gods of the nations*, says Moses, *are idols*. In the original, *Elilim; nothings, or vanities, things of no value, consideration, or power.** The prophet Isaiah, that he may demonstrate their impotence, their want of prophetic prescience, and their utter destitution of all the attributes of divinity, challenges them, and their priests, and the pretended operators of prodigies in their name, to exhibit any proof either of their power, or their foresight. *Declare to us things to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods: yea, do good, or do evil that we may be dismayed; that is, that we may have reason to fear, and venerate you, if you really possess these divine attributes; but behold ye are nothing, and your work of nought.†* And Jeremiah says, *Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do good; neither is it in them to do evil.‡* The scriptures, therefore, do not acknowledge any miraculous powers, nor any power at all in the gods of paganism; much less in their priests, their worshippers, and those criminal artists, the

* Deut. 32. 21. The same word is used Isaiah, 41. 29. *Behold they are all VANITY, and their works are NOTHING.* And in Jeremiah, 10. 8. *The stock, or idol, is a doctrine of VANITIES.*

† Isaiah 41. 23, 24.

‡ Jeremiah. 10. 5.

pests of any society in which they are tolerated, who use pretended incantations to the great disquiet of its peace and order.*

The English translators of the bible, although great and good men, being tinctured, as I have already said, with the belief that infernal spirits often exercise a supernatural agency over human affairs, and over the elements of nature, and deriving an opinion from the ancient fathers that the idols of paganism were inhabited by these malign beings, have so rendered several passages as to favour these ideas, contrary to the genuine import of the original terms. Moses, in that noble and prophetic hymn which he

* The sacred writers frequently speak of magicians, witches, necromancers, astrologers, soothsayers, and wretches who *mutter*, and *peep*. The use of the terms by which these miscreants designate their detestable arts, has been supposed, by ignorant readers, to imply an acknowledgment of the reality of those supernatural, and diabolical aids by which they pretend to make their lucky calculations, or to operate their fantastic feats, and terrifying prodigies. By no means. The sacred, like other writers, employ in speaking of them, the appellations by which they are usually known, but, without meaning to sanction their pretences. Such pretenders exist in all countries, and in all ages; and all men speak of them, without scruple, under their appropriate denominations. The wise, however, regard them merely as wicked and artful impostors, who live on the ignorance and credulity of the multitude. And in the same light, we shall see, they were regarded by Moses and the prophets.

composed just before his death, predicting the idolatries of Israel, is made to say: *They sacrificed unto DEVILS, new gods, that came newly up, whom they knew not, and their fathers feared not.* And the author of the hundred and sixth psalm, employing the same term, *shedim*, is made to say: *Yea, they sacrificed their sons, and their daughters unto DEVILS.* If all the gods of the heathen were really infernal spirits enshrined in various idol forms, why should the great legislator of Israel call them *new gods*? He is speaking of the idols of Palestine: and they were *new* only as their forms, the rites of their worship, and the atrocious and sanguinary character ascribed to them by their worshippers, differed from those of Egypt, the country which they had just abandoned. The interpretation of *shedim* is *destroyers*,* and very significantly expresses the fierce and cruel passions ascribed by the Canaanites to some of their principal deities, and especially to Moloch, or Saturn, before whose altars, human victims were daily slaughtered, and into whose burning and bra-

* The proper import of this passage of Moses is: *They sacrificed, not to devils, but to idols of a bloody and destructive character, a new species of idolatry, to which neither they, nor their fathers had been accustomed.*

zen statues infants were cast by the hands of their own parents to be roasted to death.

From the prepossession in our translators inclining them to place infernal spirits in all the idol shrines of paganism, they have rendered a term of entirely different signification from the former by the same word *devils*. Shortly after the people of Israel had escaped from Egypt, Moses, prohibiting them from returning to the superstitions of that idolatrous country, says, according to our translation, *They shall no more offer their sacrifices unto devils*; in the original it is, unto *Scirim*, or *Sehirim*, that is *hairy creatures*, or beasts,* evidently referring to the *animal worship* of that nation, which was addicted to

* “ This term, *Scirim*,” says the author of *Scripture illustrated by means of natural science*, “ signifies creatures thickly clad with hair, or whose hair stands erect, such as goats. That the Egyptians adored these animals appears from Hesiod. lib. 2. cap. 46. from Diod. Siculus, and Strabo. And even the name given to one of their capital cities, Mendes, signifies equally a goat, and the goat-formed deity Pan.” Thus far this learned, anonymous writer. Probably the name of this city was derived from the worship of this animal god which was peculiarly cultivated there. The monkey was also reckoned among the gods of Egypt. Their Jupiter Ammon was represented with the head of a ram. Anubis was worshipped under the form of a kid. Diana under that of a cat: and their principal deity was symbolized by a living bull. The addiction of this nation to a groveling superstition, and the worship of almost all species of animals, is universally known, and well explains the *Scirim* of Moses.

the lowest and most degrading superstitions. One of these terms, *schedim*, presents to us the horrible idols which the gloomy imagination of Palestine had created; the other, *seirim*, is expressive of those base and detestable objects of worship, the last reproach of human nature, which swarmed on the banks of the Nile. Neither the one, nor the other, implies devils, or infernal spirits, or any beings who possess a supernatural agency in the affairs of men; or are endued with any power to do good, or evil to mankind; or who ever disturb the regular course and order of providence over the world. And it is to be lamented that ideas, which serve only to create, or strengthen a superstitious tendency of mind, equally dishonourable and hurtful to religion, should have been so much encouraged by the error of those excellent men who have given us the holy scriptures in our native tongue.

From the preceding observations it appears that the great legislator of Israel so far from ascribing miraculous, or supernatural influences to the gods of Egypt, or Phenicia, or any of the nations of paganism, regards all their deities merely as senseless parts of the system of nature, or as dead men, both equally destitute of life and power: and their magicians, astrologers, soothsayers, and all that tribe who pre-

tend to act by demoniacal assistance, he regards as impostors who deserve the abhorrence and detestation of mankind.* He claims exclusively for the *living and true God*, a title assumed by Jehovah the God of Israel, in opposition to the dead demons or baalim of the nations, all genuine prophetic inspiration, and the sole power of operating real miracles. Moses and the prophets put the proof of their divine mission on their miracles and their predictions. Can it be supposed, then, that they would weaken, not to say, destroy this evidence by acknowledging similar

* Hence the psalmist calls the offerings made in the heathen temples, *the sacrifices of the dead*. Ps. 106. 28. *They joined themselves also unto Baal-Peor, and ate the sacrifices of the dead*. Plainly signifying that their god was only one of the baalim, or demons, or dead heroes; and that the sacrifices eaten in his temple were offerings made merely to a dead man. Selden thinks that Peor was the name of some prince to which the title of Baal was prefixed after his deification; who also gave his name to the mountain on which he was worshipped. In this passage the psalmist has an evident reference to the history recorded in the twenty-fifth chapter of the book of Numbers from the first to the third verse. The preceding illustrations serve, likewise, to explain a law of Moses, Deut. 26. 14. which has occasioned some difficulty to interpreters. Every Israelite when offering his first fruits as an oblation of thankfulness to God for crowning the year with his goodness, was obliged, in order to free himself from the reproach or suspicion of idolatry, to make this declaration: *I have not given ought thereof for the dead*; that is, I have not offered sacrifice in any idol temple.

powers, and a similar inspiration in the professors of these illusive arts? No, the sacred scriptures when justly interpreted, afford no countenance to this absurd belief.

Having thus presented to you the genuine view which the scriptures give us of demons, and demoniacal operations, the way is opened to examine, in the following lecture, those extraordinary actions of the magicians of Egypt recorded in the sacred history which are supposed to contradict the preceding conclusions.

¶ See end of the volume for Appendix to this Lecture.

LECTURE IX.

The Prodiges of the Magicians in Egypt.

THE competition of the magicians of Egypt with Moses and Aaron, in the presence of Pharaoh, presents to us some appearances on which the advocates of demoniacal miracles place the greatest reliance for the support of their system. These illustrious leaders of Israel were sent by the express command of God to redeem their brethren from the cruel bondage in which they had long been held by that haughty and despotic prince. The time was now arrived at which they were to take possession of the inheritance promised to Abraham their father; and God was to make of them a great nation, the depository of his holy law, of a pure worship, of the knowledge of his unity, and of the hopes of the future Messiah. But, it was first necessary to obtain their emancipation from a proud monarch, and a powerful nation. Such an act of justice towards an enslaved race, so contrary to the interests, the pride, and imaginary glory

of both the sovereign and the people, could be extorted only from their fear, by the most signal demonstrations of the power of Almighty God accompanying the requisitions of Moses. Every demand of the legislator from the monarch must have borne the awful and incontrovertible stamp of divine authority. He was, therefore, commissioned to require from Pharaoh the liberation of the people of Israel from their hard servitude, and was empowered to perform in the presence of the king, and of all Egypt, such miracles as would carry with them irresistible proof that he was acting by the command, and under the protection of heaven. Pharaoh would most reluctantly admit a conviction which was to deliver from his power a whole nation of slaves. This conviction, when it could no longer be resisted, he endeavoured to stifle, and, as soon as the pressure of the divine judgments was removed, to forget. For this purpose he had recourse to a class of impostors and prodigy-mongers with whom Egypt abounded, and who are to be found in smaller or greater numbers in almost all countries. He called to him his magicians, his sorcerers, and enchanter, who were accustomed to deal in the arts of jugglery, and to perform extraordinary feats of legerdemain, in the hope of finding such a resemblance between their works, and those

of Moses and Aaron, as might enable him to rank these ministers of heaven, with his own magicians, and thus quiet the reproaches and alarms of his conscience. For a moment he succeeded in allaying his terrors, and hardening his heart, till the servants of the Most High, by repeated, and inimitable displays of divine power, and by the most severe and humiliating judgments inflicted on this impious king, compelled him to acknowledge the sovereign and sole dominion of Jehovah, the God of Israel, over all the kingdoms of the earth. A few of the acts of Aaron they dexterously imitated by their arts; the rest were above their power and skill.

In comparing the works of the great Hebrew legislators with those of the artists of Pharaoh, it ought to be remembered that the whole land of Egypt was the theatre of the former, except of the first act, transforming their wands into serpents. On the other hand, the magicians according to their custom when they were introduced, as they frequently were, to amuse the leisure of an indolent monarch, must have performed their operations on a very small scale, and probably, in a prepared place in the palace, or on the river side where the king was accustomed to bathe.* That they operated only on

* *And the Lord said unto Moses, get thee unto Pharaoh in the*

small objects, and in a retired situation, before the king, and his courtiers alone, is evident from a variety of considerations. In the first place, from the design of Pharaoh in calling them before him, which was merely to try whether their arts reached to the producing of changes in natural objects, or appearances at least, similar to the miracles of Moses and Aaron. For, on however small a scale this might be done, it would be sufficient, for the time, to satisfy him of the efficacy of magical powers, and, concurring with the strong inducements to self-deception which then influenced him, to diminish the awful impressions which the miracles of these servants of the Most High were calculated to make on his mind. Alarmed, and terrified at the power and majesty of the God of Israel, his magicians restored him to a momentary peace with himself. In the next place, it was impossible that the operations of the magicians should be of the same kind, or have the same sphere, with those of Moses and Aaron whose miracles already occupied the whole extent of Egypt. Theirs must necessarily, therefore, have been confined to a very narrow compass, in a situation where sleights

morning; lo! he goeth out unto the water, and stand by the river's brink against he come. Exod. 7. 15. All the Egyptians considered it as an act of religion to bathe in waters of the Nile, which were accounted sacred.

of hand and tricks of legerdemain, for the purpose of deceiving the senses, could be easily practised by those experienced artists. That this must have been the case in the operation of appearing to turn water into blood, results from the fact, that all the streams of Egypt were already smitten by the miracle of Moses. The people were compelled to dig for water for their ordinary uses. This feat of theirs, then, seems to resemble, and was probably of the same kind with a deception annually practised by certain monks of Naples, who, in honour of saint Januarius, pretend to turn a phial of water into blood, by dexterously substituting the one for the other. There is still another consideration, which sufficiently proves that the idea is just which I have given of the sphere of these magical operations, and that they certainly did not occupy the vast extent of the miracles of Moses. If the power of the magicians had been competent, by a word, to produce such universal distress, the king, already terrified and humbled under the judgments of God, could not have been willing to inflict a double calamity of so grievous a nature on his afflicted kingdom.

The primary impression on the mind, indeed, in reading this history, as it appears in our version of the scriptures, is, that the magicians, in their first

trials, performed miracles equal to those of the servants of God. *And THEY DID so*, it is said, *with their enchantments*. But, that this phrase, in the original, does not imply equality, or even resemblance between their acts, and those of Moses and Aaron, manifestly appears from their unsuccessful attempts to imitate the fourth miracle of these divine men although the same language is still used: *and the magicians did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice; but they could not*. The obvious and necessary interpretation of this passage is: they *worked* with their *enchantments*, or with their *secret and covered arts*, which is the proper meaning of the original term,* to produce an imitation of the mosaic miracles, but were unable to succeed. Explaining this history, therefore, by the rules of just criticism, as well as of sound

* Belahetechem. The famous Dr. James Robertson of Edinburgh gives the following explication of this term: "*Ex præf. B. aff. hem. et lahateim, pl. incantationes veneficia, revera significare videtur micationes digitorum, ac gesticulationes celeres, instar fulguris gladii vibrati,*" that is, this term seems to signify the sparkling and dazzling of the fingers, and their rapid movements, like the flash of a brandished sword. If this interpretation be just, the word is derived from the verb *lahat*, *flashed*; making the art of the magicians consist merely in jugglery and legerdemain. Others derive the noun *lahateem*, incantations, from *laat* or *lot*, *hid*, or *covered*, making it signify *secret murmurs*, or *verses recited with a low voice*, after the manner of conjurers or wizards.

reason, it affords no ground for the belief of demoniacal agency in the competition of the magicians of Egypt with this great prophet of God; and interpreting it by the genuine spirit, and strain of the sacred writings, we are led to the same conclusion. Of this transaction we know nothing but from Moses himself. His narration must consequently, be explained in such a manner as to render him consistent with his own principles declared and repeated in other parts of his writings. In the preceding lecture you have seen that wherever he speaks of demons, or the gods of paganism, from whom alone magical powers could be supposed to be derived, he regards them as the mere creation of a superstitious imagination, as inanimate parts of the great system of nature, as the senseless productions of the hands of human artists, or as dead men who can neither hear nor assist their votaries. Every where he represents them as equally senseless and impotent. Every where he represents sorcerers, enchanters, soothsayers, and that whole tribe, as being merely professors of deceitful arts.* Can it be supposed, then, that Moses ascribes to Egyptian magicians or demons the power of rivalling, in

* This will be more fully demonstrated in the eleventh lecture, to be the genuine doctrine of the scriptures, by giving their

any one instance, the prophets of the living and true God; or of imitating, in one example, the omnipotent works of Jehovah?

That they should not be able to imitate the thunder, the lightning, the tempest of hail, the darkness, and the pestilence, which the dreadful minister of the judgments of God spread over the land of Egypt, is not surprising. But it does not appear, at the first view, why men, who, by their dexterity in their art, brought frogs forth from the river upon the land, before the king, should not be able to operate in a similar manner upon the next subject of the Mosaic miracles, the *lice*, of which the *dust of Egypt was full*. Those writers who believe in the reality of magical and demoniacal miracles are pleased to say that, at this point, God restrained the power of the devil. But is not this assertion gratuitously made merely to support an unscriptural theory? No such consequence can be drawn by any fair implication from the sacred history. Strange ideas, surely, must they entertain of the power of this prince of evil spirits, who suppose that he could create a living

proper interpretation to several passages, which have generally been supposed to favour demoniacal powers, and the sorceries of pagan priests and prophets.

animal, or pour forth rivers of blood, and (why not, by the same power, create a man or form a world?) yet, was he not able, according to the narration, as they understand it, to give birth to the minutest insect. A more probable solution of this phenomenon is, that this miracle turned on a subject to which they were not accustomed to apply their art; to which, perhaps, their art could not be easily applied on account of the strong adhesiveness of that animal to whatever it touches. The sleights of legerdemain require subjects less adhesive; more loose, and easily detached from the hands of the operator.* Whatever justice

* Some ingenious writers have conjectured that this miracle was intended to demonstrate to Pharaoh, and the nation, the supremacy of the God of Israel over all the false gods of Egypt, as it went to suspend the performance of their religious rites in all the temples of the kingdom. It was a law in their religion, that one of this odious tribe of insects found on a priest polluted the whole service which he performed. To avoid this great profanation their priests were obliged to minister at their altars with their heads shaved. During the prevalence of this miracle, therefore, all the gods of the country were obliged to remain without their due honours, and thus to exhibit their impotence before their worshippers.

But another interpretation of this miracle has been given by the most learned of the christian fathers, supported by the septuagint version. The Hebrew term *chinim*, translated *lice*, is, in this version, rendered *Σκνιπες*, which signifies *gnats* or *small flies*. Parkhurst makes this judicious observation upon that translation: "One can hardly suppose but the Seventy, who dwelt in

there may be in this remark, the failure of the magicians in this attempt, and their incapacity themselves to stand before the other miracles of Moses, evince their total destitution of any kind of superna-

Egypt, knew, in general, what was intended by the Hebrew name; especially as their interpretation is confirmed by Philo himself, also an Alexandrian Jew, and by Origen a christian father, who likewise lived at Alexandria. Both Philo and Origen represent them as being very troublesome. The latter describes them as being winged insects, but so small as to escape any but the acutest sight; and says, that, when settled on the body, they wound with a most sharp and painful piercer." Heb. Dict. p. 362.

These Egyptian gnats, according to the description of Origen, very much resemble an exceedingly minute insect of that species, which swarms in infinite numbers through all the southern parts of the United States. In Georgia they are called sand-flies, because they seem to rise, not from marshy soils, but from the driest sands. Origen's account represents them as somewhat smaller than they are found in Georgia and Florida. In those countries they are easily visible by a common eye; and in a few minutes will cover the whitest dress so as to make it appear almost black. In the season when these insects prevail, the whole dust of the earth seems to be animated by them, not on account of any visible movement in the dust, but of the numbers that rise from it. The air is filled with them. They insinuate themselves into the eyes, the ears, the nostrils, the mouth, and among the hair, where they become extremely tormenting by their sharp and irritating sting.

Bochart prefers the common rendering of the Hebrew term *chirim* by lice to that of Origen, and the Seventy, because they are said to come from the dust of the land, and not from the waters, whence alone he supposes gnats arise. Bochart shows by this remark that he was not acquainted with the natural history of that species of the gnat, or fly above mentioned, so common

tural power, magical, or diabolical, or by whatever name it may be called. And, taking the narration of the sacred writer simply as it stands, and we have nothing else to guide us, and subjecting it only to a

in Florida and Georgia, where they are found in innumerable myriads, as well as in Egypt. From their taking birth chiefly in the dust and sand, and not in the waters, they have received the denomination of *sand-flies*. All the species of gnats frequenting water, or marshes which I have ever seen, are much larger than these sand-flies, or those of which Origen has given us the description.

This great philologist thinks that it is an important objection to the version of the Seventy, that these insects afflicted beasts as well as men. This can be no objection to those who know how troublesome, and even distressing the insects of which I speak are to the cattle, which retreat into woods and thickets in order to brush them away, but in vain; for nothing scarcely can remove them from the hair. This last circumstance proves that the illustrious critic receives little support from the etymology of the word, which he derives from a root that signifies *stability* or *firmness*, expressing, he thinks, the strong adhesion of the *chinim*, and the difficulty of removing them from the person. This is applicable to both species of insects. The small gnats we have mentioned are infinitely active. And if these are the creatures to which Moses refers, they were probably both too minute, and too volatile to be proper subjects of the jugglers' art.

It may be thought that this interpretation makes the present miracle bear too near a resemblance to the following, which consists of innumerable *swarms* [of flies say our translators] brought upon the whole land. If their conjecture, and the supplement they have added to the text, be right, the flies were probably of that large species, called the *zimb*, which Mr. Bruce, in his travels, informs us, are the most terrible plague of cattle in Upper Egypt, Abyssinia, and all the neighbouring

fair, unforced criticism, we see nothing in the pretended prodigies of these dealers in magic beyond the ordinary feats of jugglers played off before the populace in every country.*

Those who have been accustomed to regard these magical operations in a different light, and to ascribe to them a supernatural character, will, at first, perhaps, be ready to imagine that the opinions here stated, and I think clearly made out, are calculated to impeach, and bring into doubt, the miracles of Moses himself. For we are apt so to confound our own prepossessions with the system of divine truth as to conceive that they must stand, or fall together.

parts of Africa. Even the thick skins of the elephant, and rhinoceros are not able to defend them against the long and painful piercer which the zimb darts into their flesh. For their further protection, therefore, in the season when the fly prevails, they are obliged to roll themselves in the mud formed by the winter rains, in pits, and thus cover themselves in a thick coating of clay. The cattle, says this traveller, discover the greatest signs of terror when they hear the approach of this enemy. This is, perhaps, the fly to which the prophet Isaiah refers: *The Lord shall hiss for the fly that is in the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt*; the emblem of the fearful scourge that God was about to bring upon Israel. Is. 7. 18.

* The chief distinction between Egypt and other regions in this respect was, that Egypt, from her superstitious spirit, gave more encouragement than others to this pernicious kind of artists.

I have, however, no hesitation in affirming that, so far from impairing the credit of real miracles, I find in these principles their only true support. The wonders which God performed by the hand of Moses would sink in our esteem if we could believe that there was any similitude between them and the works of a magician, or of the most powerful of evil spirits. On the contrary, they were all of such grandeur and extent, as to be infinitely superior to all the efforts of human power, or the contrivances of human skill.* They carried upon them the sublime

* To this, the first miracle may seem an exception. Dr. Shaw, in his travels, p. 429, and supplement p. 62. informs us that there is a species of serpent in Egypt capable of being trained to play innocently round the body, and to be handled without hurt. These serpents are of great use to jugglers in their tricks of legerdemain to this day. The substitution of such a serpent for a wand was anciently esteemed one of the most extraordinary, though one of the most common feats of magicians. That credulous and superstitious people believed that a real change of the wand took place, and that the serpent, which sprung out of it, was animated by some demon spirit. Moses, by performing a miracle which resembled a sleight of substitution which they were known to be able to perform, probably invited them to make the experiment of their skill, in order, by defeating it, to show the vanity and impotence of their demon spirits, which were believed by the Egyptians to be present in these serpents. His serpent devoured theirs, and thereby demonstrated that they were nothing but ordinary reptiles. This conclusion was a natural consequence of another opinion of the pagan polytheists. They believed that the works of each god were wholly independent on

and manifest tokens of the presence of an almighty power. They pervaded the whole land of Egypt; they filled a mighty kingdom with distress and mourning; they afflicted and terrified the prince in his palace. The pride, the interest, the passions of an absolute king, whose will had never before been contradicted, all rose up in the breast of Pharaoh to oppose the command of God, whom he knew not, conveyed to him by the representative of an enslaved nation whom he despised. Yet was he humbled by the awful majesty of that divine power, and those terrible inflictions which accompanied the word of Moses; and made him repeatedly sue to the prophet, as an intercessor with heaven, to deliver both the prince and the nation from the pressure of the heavy judgments which had fallen upon them.

You perceive then, in this representation, a wide and almost infinite difference between the miracles of the great legislator of Israel, and the prodigies of the Egyptian magicians, which is lost by that opinion,

the power of other deities. And though a more powerful god might oppose, or ultimately thwart the designs of a weaker one, yet he could not undo what that inferior demon had already done. When the serpents of the magicians, therefore, were devoured by the rod of Moses, it was a proof on their own principles, that they were neither produced, nor animated by any deity.

so dishonourable to religion, which ascribes to the latter a degree, though a humbler degree, of miraculous power. The judgments inflicted by the servant of God were of the most public nature, and affected a great nation throughout all its extent; whereas these magical tricks were performed only in private where there was every opportunity of practising undetected their deceitful arts. That their operations were performed in private apartments, or in a retired situation, is an assertion not hazarded at random, and without evidence. It is easily inferred from the proud and indolent character of a despotic monarch, who only wanted an excuse for denying the divine mission of the Hebrew prophet, and for refusing to emancipate a whole nation of valuable slaves, who contributed so much to the power of his kingdom, and the splendour of his crown. But you have seen that there are other reasons which give complete certainty to this fact. These secret and juggling exhibitions were sufficient, for the moment, to satisfy the mind of a prince, who wished only to deceive himself, and to stifle in his own heart the apprehensions excited by the astonishing powers displayed by the great legislator of Israel. Ignorant of the true God, the sole and almighty Lord of heaven and earth, he would naturally regard Moses,

when he first addressed him, as one of the tribe of magicians acting by the assistance of some national demon.* This false apprehension manifestly continued till God, by the word of his servant, proceeding to redouble his chastisements on the pride, and injustice of Pharaoh, the hand of the supreme and omnipotent Jehovah became so terrible and undeniable that the impious monarch was forced to tremble and submit. The magicians themselves, smitten with the judgments of heaven, acknowledged the omnipotence of Jehovah. And the king, under the pressure of his calamities, was obliged at every new stroke to have recourse to Moses as an intercessor with God. When each judgment was removed, indeed, the impressions which it had made upon his heart, were, in time, effaced,† and he forgot the pro-

* The remembrance of the miracles of Moses seems to have been preserved in the annals of Egypt, recorded, however, in the natural style of Egyptian history as the works of a great magician. Eusebius quotes an ancient Pythagorean philosopher by the name of Numenius, as saying that, "Jannes and Jambres excelled in the art of magic, and were therefore chosen by common consent, to be opposed to Musæus." *Præp. ev. l. 9. cap. 8.* And Pliny, in his Natural History, borrowing the idea most probably from the same source, ranks Moses among the most famous of magicians. *Lib. 30. cap. 2.*

† Ordinary readers, deceived by the curtness of the Mosaic narration, are apt to imagine that all these prodigious scenes followed one another in quick and rapid succession. It is almost

mises he had made to the head of the Jewish nation. But this contradiction in the conduct of the king of Egypt ought not to surprise us more than that which is often seen in the character of very wicked men. Under deep affliction they acknowledge the hand of God which smites them, they tremble under the effects of his power, and the apprehensions of his justice; but when the suffering is removed they return, with returning prosperity, to their habitual vices.

In this history, therefore, the sacred writer affords not the least foundation for the strange belief of demoniacal miracles.

certain that they embraced the space of many months, and, perhaps, of some years. Courts easily find the means of protracting important negotiations. And it would require a long time to prepare a nation, especially in the disadvantageous circumstances of the people of Israel, to march from Egypt to Palestine, in the face of so many powerful enemies.

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LECTURE X.

Of the Sorceress of Endor.

A STRONGER instance of demoniacal or diabolical powers is supposed to be contained in the history of the sorceress of Endor, recorded in the twenty eighth chapter of the first book of Samuel. From the strain of the narration, in its literal, and most obvious acceptation, it would seem as if this wicked woman had a command over the spirits of the dead which enabled her to disturb the repose of the grave. But as this is contrary to every sound principle of religion and of reason, those who are advocates of diabolical miracles, suppose that infernal spirits have the faculty of appearing in the form of the dead, and that, for this purpose, they put themselves under the control of the basest and most detestable of the human species, *who are sold to iniquity*. But this is only one of the thousand absurdities which a man must swallow who gives himself up to the belief of demoniacal miraculous powers. The story of the

sorceress of Endor, and the supposed appearance of the prophet Samuel to the king of Israel, must be interpreted on quite different principles. This illustrious prophet, by whose counsels the affairs of Israel had been long directed, was now dead. Saul, an imprudent and impetuous prince, no longer restrained by the authority of this holy man, had launched out into many excesses, and impieties, by which he had forfeited the favour and protection of God. Reduced to the greatest extremities by internal commotions in his kingdom, and by a dangerous war in which he was engaged with the neighbouring nations of Palestine, God had refused to answer him in the usual ways in which he communicated his will to the rulers of his chosen people. Overwhelmed by the numbers of his enemies, and by gloomy forebodings of his approaching fate, he had recourse, in the perturbation and distraction of his mind, to the sinful expedient of applying to an infamous professor of the art of necromancy, in order, if possible, to learn from her the course he ought to pursue in his present critical situation, and the fortune that awaited him, especially in that desperate battle in which he was about to engage. The laws of Moses had rigorously condemned to the punishment of death all persons who practised these abominable arts, not

only on account of the abuses to which they were liable, to the great injury of the ignorant part of society; but, especially because they tended to divert the reverence and worship of the people of Israel from the living and true God, to whom alone their civil allegiance, as well as religious homage was due.* Saul himself had lately caused diligent search to be made for persons of this pernicious craft throughout his kingdom, and had put to death all whom he could discover. Yet, his present distresses rousing every latent spark of superstition in his soul, he was so far forgetful of his duty, as the supreme ruler of Israel under God, as to seek some relief to the agitation of his mind, from one of these unhappy wretches who had escaped the rigour of his justice.

In the progress of the history we are informed that Saul, having come to this sorceress in disguise,

* These laws have been severely commented on for their rigour by infidel writers. But it is always to be remembered that God himself condescended to be the actual sovereign of the nation of Israel. Every species of idolatry, therefore, or of demon worship, which necessarily formed a part in the necromantic or magical arts, was a diversion of the allegiance and duty of the people from their only true, and supreme ruler to these horrible phantoms which had usurped his place. In this view, magic and sorcery, and other practices of the same kind, were treason against the lawful head of their government, and were justly subjected to the highest penalties of the law.

desired her to call up to him the prophet Samuel who was lately dead. While employed in her operations, she saw, or pretended to see, some venerable image* at the appearance of which she cried out in terror, and turning to the king recognised him under his disguise. Saul, after promising her, on the oath of a prince, that no injury should befall her for this exercise of her art, asked her what she had seen? A manifest proof that he himself discerned nothing. She described the person of Samuel, with the habit which he used to wear: on which it is said, that Saul *perceived* that it was Samuel; not from any thing which he *saw*, but from the *description* of the woman. Supposing that Samuel was before him, and penetrated with fear, he bowed with his face to the earth, in which attitude he could still discern no object, but he heard a voice address him as from the prophet, demanding why he had disturbed him in his grave. Then, after a brief dialogue, the same reproaching

* She said she saw *Elohim*, *Gods*, ascending out of the earth. This term, according to the opinion of the best Hebrew critics, is sometimes used to signify a person of official dignity, and venerable aspect, as is evidently the case in this place; for Saul immediately asks, of what form is he? referring to his judge-like appearance, and using the singular number. He does not ask of what form are *they*? as would naturally be expected from the literal version of the term *Elohim*.

voice proceeds to denounce upon him the fearful judgments of God for his remissness, and unfaithfulness in his duties as a king of Israel, and concludes with this solemn prediction: *the Lord will also deliver Israel, with thee, into the hand of the Philistines: and to-morrow shalt thou, and thy sons be with me.*

Such are the outlines of this remarkable history, from which a hasty, or indiscriminating reader, who should not consider the usual strain of scripture narration, in which appearances are related simply as they are presented to the senses, and the pretended feats of these wicked artists are narrated in their own style, would be ready to conceive that the sorceress really possessed a power over the dead, and by her incantations, actually brought up the spirit of Samuel to give those divine responses to the criminal king which he had sought in vain from God in his appointed way. But since reason and scripture both are opposed to the idea of any supernatural agency being exerted in the art of magic, and, universally, of diabolical influence being ever, in any instance, capable of controlling the regular and established order of nature, it is neither rational nor pious to ascribe to witchcraft and sorcery the power of raising the dead; of disturbing the bodies and

spirits even of the most holy men, who have already gone to sleep in Christ; and thus defeating the purposes of God, by drawing from *them* notices and revelations concerning the future, which he has refused, or rendered impossible according to the ordinary course of his providence.*

This singular fact in the sacred history, then, we must explain in a way that shall be consonant with the scriptures themselves. It may be done on one of two suppositions; either that the whole scene was an effect of the art of the sorceress, assisted by the natural, but rare talent of ventriloquy; or, that God, in order to punish the impiety of the king, unexpectedly to the sorceress, and quite beyond the rules of her art, miraculously sent the prophet, to announce to him the fearful judgments which were impending over him. Both these suppositions I shall briefly illustrate, leaving it to you to choose that which may

* The absurdity of giving such powers to these servants of the devil over the spirits of the dead forcibly struck bishop Patrick, as it has done many other writers, but they seem not to have considered the equal, or greater absurdity of giving them the same power over the devil himself, to make him come, and go at pleasure, and give forth the responses of futurity, which the bishop does without scruple, and makes him, at the same time, a preacher of righteousness. For, according to him, the devil in this whole transaction personates the dead prophet.

appear to you most consistent with the sacred text, and with reason.

On the first, the whole scene must have been an effect merely of the art of the sorceress. And this is neither an impossible, nor an improbable supposition. It was not an uncommon thing among the nations of paganism, from whom the people of Israel borrowed so many impious superstitions, to find wretches, equally cunning and wicked, who, by dreadful incantations addressed to their infernal deities, and by horrible rites, pretended to disturb the order of nature, and to call up the ghosts of the dead from their tombs.* And, when they added to their abomi-

* From these pretences the title of their art has been derived; *necromancy* being formed from two Greek words which signify prophesying by means of the dead. Many of the ancients supposed that, at death, a kind of gaseous, or fine material envelope still adhered to the soul as its vehicle, which, being separated from the body, bore a resemblance to it, and was capable of being so condensed as, occasionally, to become visible. This was the substance of apparitions, and the subject of the necromancer's art. Of the rites and incantations used by these wretches Horace gives us a dismal picture in his ode to Canidia. [Epodes Ode 5th] And Tibullus describes the pretensions of the whole tribe in the following couplet, in which the sorceress is said to raise up again even the dead who have been consumed to ashes on their funeral piles.

Hæc cantu finditque solum, manesque sepulchris

Elicit, et tepido devocat ossa rogo. Lib. 1. cl. 2.

nable arts the faculty of ventriloquy, which was sometimes the case, they possessed a powerful dominion over the popular mind. That the woman whom Saul consulted was endued with this faculty is rendered probable from the terms in which his orders are conveyed to his servants; seek me out, says he, a woman who has a *familiar spirit*, in the original it is a *spirit of OB*. This phrase is rendered in the translation of the seventy by the Greek term *ἰγασπιμύθος*, which signifies a ventriloquist. I remark, after Dr. Parkhurst, that it can hardly be supposed that the seventy, who wrote while the Hebrew was yet a living language, could be ignorant of the meaning of terms expressive of the customs, manners, or arts of the Jews, more than of those which were appropriated to objects of natural history. A proof almost decisive that this woman who had a *spirit of OB*, was one who possessed from nature the extraordinary, and dangerous faculty of ventriloquy.* This is

Much were it to be wished that similar pretences and practices were not still to be found even in christian countries, to the great disturbance of weak and superstitious minds.

* Ventriloquy is the power of emitting sounds from within, and even uttering words, without visibly moving the lips, in such a manner that the sounds may seem to come from any distance, and in any direction. The Hebrew word OB, or AOB, means *distended*, or *bottle-shaped*, and was, therefore, used to

so strange, and unaccountable a power that the populace in all countries have been ready to imagine that those who possess it are accompanied by some familiar spirit, genius, or demon, who inspires them with a divine and prophetic afflatus, or himself utters his oracles and responses from within, as from his shrine. This popular idea, which, doubtless, was Saul's also, seems to justify our translators in rendering the original by the English phrase *a familiar spirit*. The original term, however, manifestly indicates the nature of the art practised by this pythoness; and if it had been rendered *ventriloquist* in our translation agreeably to that of the seventy, it might have prevented much misapprehension of this history, and many false and superstitious notions concerning the actions and powers of evil spirits. It would have sufficiently explained the circumstance

signify a pythoness, or ventriloquist, because in the effort of ventriloquy, the stomach was supposed to be distended.

In practising the art of necromancy the ventriloquist often made the words seem to come from the earth with a hollow, muttering, or stridulous sound, such as the imagination of men has generally ascribed to ghosts. To this the prophet Isaiah has a reference in denouncing the judgments of God upon Jerusalem. Is. 29. 4. *And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust.*

of the dialogue between Saul and the supposed Samuel, without having recourse to any supernatural apparition, or the presence of any spirit either good or evil, to account for it. As we learn from Horace that such dialogues between the living hags and the ghosts supposed to be raised by them, were frequently carried on by this artifice, in that stridulous and querimonious tone of voice commonly imputed to these unhappy and shadowy beings.

Quid singula memorem? quo pacto alterna loquentes
Umbrae cum Sagana resonarent triste et acutum.*

The chief difficulty which presents itself on this interpretation arises from the certainty and accuracy of the prediction uttered by this woman concerning the disastrous fortunes of the king, and the boldness with which she pronounced it. *The Lord*, saith she, *hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it to thy neighbour, even to David. Moreover the Lord will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines; and to-morrow shalt thou, and thy sons be with me.* But this difficulty is more apparent than real. It is well known that the professors of these secret arts were generally persons of great natural sa-

* "Why should I dwell on each particular? How the ghosts, in sad and stridulous accents, held alternate discourse with Sagana the sorceress," &c. Hor. lib. 1. Sat. 8. l. 40, 41.

gacity, and acuteness of mind, and like the priests who directed the pagan oracles, had usually prepared the means of obtaining the most extensive and accurate information on all subjects concerning which it was to be expected that responses would be required of them. The state of the kingdom of Israel, at that period, was not unknown to those who had any acquaintance with public affairs. David was destined to the possession of the crown, and had been publicly designated to the succession, by a prophet, and by the most solemn rites of religion. Saul, by the caprice and folly of his administration, had thrown the state into great disorders. It was divided by civil dissensions, and involved in a dangerous and unequal war with the neighbouring nations of Palestine. The army of Israel, and that of her enemies, were now almost within view of each other. The king himself had begun to despair of his own affairs. Yet, as is usual with melancholy and superstitious minds, he sought, even in despair, for some doubtful response that might give him a momentary relief. Of the most material of these circumstances, and of the denunciations of the prophet Samuel before his death, the sorceress could not be ignorant. From all these considerations it results that the accuracy of the prediction is not so extraordinary as

at the first view it appears to be. And, although the prediction of the death of Saul and his sons seems more exact in point of time, than is consistent with merely human foresight, yet we have the concurring testimony of the best Hebrew critics that the term *Machar*, translated *to-morrow*, signifies also an *indefinite futurity*.* Of the discomfiture of Saul's forces there could be little doubt; and considering his bravery, and his rank, and that he was now to fight for his crown and kingdom, there could be as little doubt that he would rather perish in the field than survive his defeat, only to be kept in a disgraceful servitude, or, perhaps, put to death, according to the barbarous policy of the age. The same motives would operate upon his sons who were with him in the army, and the same circumstances probably determine the fate of the bravest of them: for, that they were not all slain appears from the following history of David's reign. *Machar*, *soon* shalt thou and thy sons be with me in the state of the dead. That the period could not be prolonged was sufficiently certain from the proximity of the two armies. Armies, in that age, could not be kept long in the field. They were nothing but an armed militia rapidly collected together,

* See note at the end of this lecture, where *Machar* appears to be rendered in different passages, *in time to come*.

who always hastened to decide the war by a single battle, that they might return again to the labours of the plough.

There was nothing, then, in these operations of the sorceress of Endor which the arts of necromancy could not reach: and nothing in her predictions that was beyond the ken of human sagacity. Her boldness, however, in pronouncing so harsh, and severe a denunciation in the presence of the king, may justly occasion some surprise. But fallen royalty is no longer respected; and the terrors of a superstitious king had put him absolutely in her power. Besides, as the fortunes of David were now rising, an unprincipled woman, who knew not his integrity, might easily suppose that such an oracle would serve to recommend her to the heir apparent. Such is the interpretation which may be given of this curious history, considered as an account merely of magical art and imposture.

But, there is another, and widely different interpretation which may be given of it, which has the authority also of many great names to support it. It has been supposed that this woman's art was here entirely superseded, and she herself surprised by a celestial apparition sent immediately by God himself to denounce to a wicked king the heavy judgments

which were ready to fall upon him. Many circumstances concur to give probability to this opinion. That was an age in which God frequently declared his will, in an extraordinary manner, to the rulers of his chosen people. Lately, indeed, he had refused to meet with Saul, in any of the ways in which he had usually communicated himself to a judge or king of Israel. But as God was now about to punish his iniquities, it is conjectured that he chose the moment of Saul's chief crime, when he was seeking, in an unlawful way, to discover the secret destinations of divine providence, to denounce his condemnation, and to make his guilty curiosity the instrument of his punishment. And it is true that the sorceress, almost at the commencement of her incantations, exclaimed, apparently in great terror, as if she perceived an image which was not expected from the effects of her art; and much more awful and majestic than any with which her art had hitherto made her acquainted. Instantly she recognised the king under his disguise, and reproached him for the imposition he had attempted to pass upon her.* She, and every

* Those who maintain the former interpretation, persuaded that the Most High would never condescend to mingle himself with infernal incantations, or give an apparent sanction to practices so impious and abominable, believe that the exclamation of

Israelite, knew that Jehovah deigned to appear by extraordinary visions, or messengers, only to the supreme rulers of his people. Her suddenly knowing Saul, therefore, on the rising of this unexpected apparition, carries with it a strong implication that the appearance was supernatural; and was probably that of the spirit of Samuel himself sent by God on this awful errand to a prince who had so far forgotten his duty to the Almighty Ruler, and Protector of Israel.

If the indignant prophet demands why he had disturbed him in his grave, an effect which, evidently, no diabolical art could produce, it is, on the supposition we are now making, only a keen and poignant sarcasm intended to convey the severest reprehension of his folly in thinking to obtain, by sorcery, and magical incantations, an answer which could be given only by God, and which an offended God had now unexpectedly met him to give in terrible vengeance.

And, finally, the particularity and precision of the prediction with which this history is concluded, it is

the woman, her affectation of terror, and of then first knowing the king, were only pieces of address in her to work upon the mind of Saul, and, among other objects, to obtain his oath for her security and protection.

supposed, notwithstanding what has been formerly said to explain it upon different principles, necessarily refer the whole scene to the agency of God. Although this woman, by the extent and faithfulness of her intelligence, might have been able to foretell the probable discomfiture of the army of Israel, and might have supposed, from the bravery and desperation of Saul, that he would fall in the conflict, it could not have been so certain that his sons also would perish; and that the battle, and its disastrous issue should happen on the following day.* But if this should not be thought an unsurmountable difficulty, it seems highly improbable that a mercenary, and unprincipled woman, whose interest and whose life depended on the good pleasure of the king, should have dared to utter so bold a prediction; and, indeed, that any wise and prudent person should have had sufficient courage to utter it, who had not an immediate commission for that purpose from heaven.

* The literal translation of *Machar*, is *to-morrow*; and although it has an indefinite meaning, as in Gen. 30. 33. and Exod. 13. 14, and other places where it is translated *in time to come*, yet these writers insist that its literal signification alone ought to be followed in this passage, otherwise, it would lose its claim to be regarded as a prophecy, for which purpose it was evidently uttered.

Thus have I given you two interpretations of this extraordinary history. Either of them will explain the circumstances. Both preclude the idea of any magical, or demoniacal power being exerted in the case; and go still further to confirm the conclusion we have formerly drawn, that no miracles are ever wrought except by the power of God alone.

LECTURE XI.

Some passages of Scripture explained. Apollonius Tyanzus.

ALTHOUGH the sacred scriptures, in repeated declarations, and the most explicit language, deny the existence of any magical, or demoniacal influence capable of disturbing the established order of nature, and assert that miracles are exclusively the work of God, and the infallible seal of divine truth, there are certain passages, however, which, as they appear in our translation, are often alleged to maintain a contrary doctrine. In order to support the principles I have before laid down with regard to demoniacal powers, and which I consider as being of the highest importance in stating the evidences of revelation; and in order likewise, to show the consistency of the scriptures throughout, both with these principles, and with themselves, let me refer you only to two or three passages which seem most directly to favour the power, or prescience of demons; and by giving to a few words their natural, and, indeed, necessary

interpretation, they will be found perfectly to harmonize with the doctrines of Moses, and the prophets upon this subject, already presented to you. The first is in the thirteenth chapter of the book of Deuteronomy from the beginning to the fourth verse. *If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and GIVETH THEE A SIGN OR A WONDER, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, let us go after other gods, and let us serve them, thou shalt not hearken unto his words: for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart. And that prophet, and that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death.*

If there arise a prophet, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder. Many commentators understand these expressions as implying the actual working of a miracle by this pretended prophet.* The smallest at-

* Even bishop Patrick says they may imply either giving forth a prophecy, or working a miracle. And as God, he supposes, might permit the working of a miracle by a false prophet to try the fidelity of his people, he concludes with this strange observation: "For, it had been great weakness to suffer even a miracle to shake their faith, after it had been confirmed by so many miracles." I maintain, on the contrary, that it would not have been weakness; for nothing would have been more reasonable than to conclude that he who could perform one miracle, was equally able to perform others.

tention to the following sentence, one would think, should have been sufficient to destroy this absurd idea. *And if the sign or the wonder*, it is said, *come to pass*. The event is still doubtful. So that no actual miracle has taken place. And the language evidently refers to some natural phenomenon, which the prophet or soothsayer is supposed to point out, as the presignification of some future contingency. The *sign* and the *wonder*, then, mentioned by the sacred writer, are such natural, but extraordinary, or uncommon appearances in nature as were usually interpreted by the heathen to be omens or presages of auspicious, or inauspicious events which were near at hand. This meaning is confirmed, not only by the use of the original terms in other parts of the Hebrew scriptures, but by the import of the corresponding Greek terms employed in the septuagint version.* The simple and obvious meaning of this

* The original words are *Oth* and *Mopheth*, which imply any visible presignification of a future event. Isaiah walking naked and barefoot was for a *sign*, and *wonder*, or portent, *oth* and *mopheth*, of the distress and punishment of Egypt and Ethiopia. Is. 20. 3. Ezekiel digging through the wall, and carrying out his household stuff through the breach was to be for a *sign*, *oth*, to the house of Israel of their approaching calamities. Ezek. 12. 3. 6. *Ezekiel is to you a sign, oth: according to all that he hath done, shall ye do.* Ezek. 24. 24.

passage, therefore, may be thus expressed; if any prognosticator, dreamer, astrologer, or soothsayer, *giveth, or pointeth out*, to thee any portent, or extraordinary phenomenon in nature, as the operation of his idol deity, and sent by him at once to portend some future event, and to prove his divinity; regard him not; for all the phenomena of nature, and all the issues of providence are under the control of God alone. And, if the event which he predicts should take place, as, among innumerable contingencies in the compass of nature, there may often be found a coincidence between the omen and its predicted consequence; let not that mislead you to ascribe any power, or foreknowledge to their idols, nor seduce you from the worship of the living and true God, who by an omnipotent arm, and by the most illustrious miracles, brought you forth from the land of

The version of the seventy has rendered these terms by *σημείων ἔ τιρας*, words which signify any omens, portents, or prodigies, from which diviners were accustomed to draw their conjectures concerning futurity. Elian says, "When Alexander led his forces against Thebes, the gods sent *signs and wonders*, [*σημεία ἔ τιράλα*] presignifying their approaching misfortunes." In a like sense are these words used in the New Testament. Luke 21. 11. 25. *And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, &c. and fearful sights, and great SIGNS.* [*σημεία*] *And there shall be signs,* [*σημεία*] *in the sun, &c. And Acts 2. 19. And I will show WONDERS* [*τιράλα*] *in heaven above, and SIGNS* [*σημεία*] *in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke.*

Egypt. *The Lord your God proveth you.* He does not arrest the course of nature, but suffers it to proceed in its regular train, to accomplish the omen, or portent, although it may seem, thereby, to add confirmation to the claims of idolatry, and the pretences of imposture. In the course of his providence he often suffers the natural order of things to present powerful temptations to a dereliction of duty, to minds previously disposed to yield to their influence. In this way he exposes to themselves, and to all others, the unfairness and unfaithfulness of their hearts. Whereas those whose hearts are confirmed in the love of truth, and of God, will firmly resist every seduction to evil, and will feel their adherence to duty strengthened by every unsuccessful attempt to shake it. These reflections present to us a principle that explains this declaration: *for the Lord your God proveth you.* Often the natural phenomena of the atmosphere, or the heavens wear a portentous appearance to an ignorant people, and are interpreted by their fears as presages of approaching disasters. Sometimes the superior skill, or address of the pagan priests, enabled them to avail themselves of these phenomena to support the reputation of their oracular wisdom, and of their power over the course of nature. They pointed them out as omens, or auguries of future events, sent by the power of their gods;

and by the gods subjected in some measure to the control of the priests themselves. If the events were in the order of nature to happen, as often they might, then would the fortunate guess of the soothsayer establish in ignorant and idolatrous minds, his credit, and that of his idols. God, who guides the wheels of providence would still command them to move on in their regular course, although he might thereby seem to add confirmation to superstition. Those only whose hearts are already inclined to the licentious rites of the pagan temples, or, who, not confiding in the omnipotent and universal control of divine providence, reverence with religious homage these horrible phantoms of a distempered mind, will be drawn aside by them from the worship and duty which they owe to the only true God. There was ground enough in these *signs and wonders* exhibited by the priests of paganism for a corrupted heart to lay hold of, which was predisposed to idolatry, and was already wishing for a reason to justify its defection from the true religion. God therefore permitted such men to be exposed to the temptations mentioned in the text, in order *to prove them*, and to try their steadfastness in the principles in which they had been educated. For those who truly fear the Almighty Jehovah will never fear the dismal phantoms of superstition; and

those who *worship him in spirit and in truth*, will not be drawn aside by such slight pretences to the impure rites of idol temples.

* From this passage, therefore, when we give their plain and natural interpretation to the words, the cause of demoniacal miracles derives no accession of strength. The scriptures every where pronounce against them.

Another passage, on which the advocates of the miraculous powers of infernal spirits rely, is found among the precautionary admonitions which our blessed Saviour addressed to his disciples against those impostors with whom Judea should be filled, and by whom it should be distracted, immediately before the final destruction of Jerusalem.* *There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, saith he, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.*† The original term translated, *shall show*, is

* Mat. 24. 24. Mark 13. 22.

† And if these impostors *really* performed *great and wonderful* miracles, how was it possible that they should not be deceived? Is it said, by the greater miracles performed by Christ and his apostles? This is reducing the question to a calculation merely of more or less; and who is able at all times to make that calculation accurately? Besides, making no other distinction between truth and falsehood, is, certainly, very inconsiderately, if not impiously placing their evidence very much on the same footing.

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Jerusa, the literal signification of which is *shall give*, or *give out*, viz. that they will perform great wonders. This is not widely different from the expression used concerning the impostor prophets in the preceding passage; and is perfectly conformable with the prediction of our Saviour, and with the history of that period written by Josephus. Judea, according to him, was, for a considerable time before the destruction of Jerusalem, full of impostors who often led the people out into the wilderness, *undertaking* says the historian, *to exhibit divine wonders before them*. Sometimes they conducted them to the banks of the Jordan promising to divide that river for them to pass, as Joshua had formerly done. But, in every instance, these ambitious, or enthusiastic leaders perished, and their followers were dispersed, and a great part of them suffered from the Romans the punishment due to their folly. The nearer the Jews approached to their destruction, the more were these false prophets, and false Messiahs multiplied, and the more were the credulous multitude deceived, because these impostors fell in with the popular prejudice, and the national pride, in promising the Jews

Pity it is that so many christian writers have furnished their enemies with weapons against themselves.

deliverance from the Roman yoke, and assuring them of victory over all their enemies. Even during the conflagration of the temple, in the last moments of that fatal siege which issued in the perpetual desolation of Jerusalem, a false prophet encouraged the phrensied populace with the expectation of some immediate and miraculous sign from heaven, of their approaching salvation.

If it be asked how *promises*, which most commonly disappointed expectation, could *deceive* any reasonable man; much more, could be in danger of deceiving the faithful servants of Christ? I reply: When any high and popular passion has seized a people, as was the case with the Jews at that time, who were all eager to throw off the Roman yoke, and were full of expectation that the period of their national deliverance was at hand, there are always multitudes who are ready to catch at any hope that falls in with the current of opinion, and to follow any leader who promises them success in their favourite project. The most boastful pretenders, especially if some accidental omens, or temporary instances of good fortune occur to flatter them, will often meet with the most numerous, and zealous adherents. And even the coolly rational, and the sincerely pious, who enter in any degree into the public

feelings, are liable to be borne along with the popular tide.

Historians record the appearance of an unusual number of extraordinary natural phenomena at that period which were calculated to make a deep impression on ignorant minds to whom their causes were unknown. Of these omens, artful impostors well knew how to avail themselves, to excite expectation and to give authority to their predictions. In this view an interpretation may be given to the Greek word *δεικνυσθαι*, translated *show*, perfectly coinciding with that formerly given to the expression of Moses: *If a prophet giveth thee a sign; δεικνυσθαι, they shall point out great signs and wonders*, as testimonies of the approbation of heaven, and dexterously turn them to the advantage of their cause, so as to complete the deception of their followers. And, our Saviour adds, *so as to deceive, if possible, the very elect*. To deceive the elect! In what respect? This expression merits our particular attention. The fictitious prodigies, and false predictions of these wicked men could not be supposed to go so far as to shake the faith of christians in the Redeemer of the world; but they might make them distrust, or forget his predictions concerning the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, and thereby involve them in its dreadful catastrophe:

For Christ had forewarned his disciples that signs and portents should be seen in the heavens and on the earth, before the great day of his judgment upon that nation should arrive; and that pretenders and false prophets should make this impious use of them to deceive the people. He exhorted all, therefore, who believed his words that, as soon as the signals he had foretold should appear, they should escape from the falling city. They did so, and preserved themselves from the fate of the unbelieving Jews, which was disastrous beyond that of the inhabitants of any other city recorded in history.*

Thus, from every examination which we have made, and according to the rules of the fairest criticism, we may justly conclude that the sacred scriptures give no countenance to the idea of miracles being performed by any being, except God alone.†

* It is recorded that the christians, at that time residing in Jerusalem, obedient to the command of their Master, actually forsook the city, and retiring to Pella, a small town at no great distance, lived securely under the protection of the Romans, while the capital of their country was laid desolate, and almost the whole nation exterminated.

† It is hardly necessary, after the preceding illustrations, to take notice of an objection to this conclusion, taken from saint Paul's description of *the man of sin: whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs, and lying wonders*. All who are acquainted with the original text must immediately

And we derive hence this ulterior conclusion, which I would repeat again and again, that miracles afford infallible proof of a divine revelation. Wherever we can show that a miracle has been performed, there, we may be assured, that God has spoken.

As Jewish writers, and even many christians, the latter, indeed, unintentionally, and through the influence of false prepossessions, have discredited the miracles of the gospel by ascribing similar powers to demons and infernal spirits; so the enemies of revealed religion have endeavoured to weaken the force of its miraculous evidence, by affecting to produce to us relations of equally well attested miracles to which we attach no divine authority. It would be tedious and uninteresting to go through all those histories of miraculous actions, or appearances, which have been either more directly insisted on, or occasionally referred to for this purpose. It will be deemed sufficient, I presume, if I take the most distinguished of the whole tribe of impostors, who has, with the greatest confidence, not to say impudence, been brought into comparison with our Lord Jesus

perceive that the syntax requires the epithet *lying* to be prefixed to the other terms, *power*, and *signs*, as well as to *wonders*: so that all the pretended achievements of this enemy of the Saviour, are at once branded by the apostle with falsehood, and imposture.

Christ, and show the uncertainty of his history, and, consequently, the weakness of every pretence which has been erected on this foundation against the divine testimony which God has given to the mission, and doctrine of our blessed Saviour. It is evident that I refer to Apollonius Tyanæus,* with whom no worker of prodigies, or *giver forth of signs and wonders*, in the heathen world, can be placed in any kind of competition. This man was born near the beginning of the first century of the christian era. At the early age of sixteen he attached himself zealously to the pythagorean school, and submitted to the most rigorous discipline of that abstemious sect. He suffered his hair to grow without any care; for his clothing, he wore nothing but a coarse linen frock; and he was so temperate in eating and drinking that he abstained entirely from wine and from flesh. Among other extraordinary things told of him, he is said to have preserved an inviolable silence for six years, during which time, however, he quelled several popular insurrections in different cities, without uttering a single word. He travelled, either in quest of knowledge, or for the purpose of communi-

* He derives this appellation from his native city of Tyana in Cappadocia, a province of the Lesser Asia.

eating instruction, over the greater part of the then known world. In the course of his journeys he is said to have performed many prodigies; and every where his mortified appearance attracted the admiration of the multitude. He pretended, and a most ridiculous pretence certainly it was, to understand the language of birds, and thence to become possessed of the knowledge of future events by the oracles which they were supposed by the pagans to be constantly giving out around us.* By the impression which he gave of his wisdom, he was highly venerated throughout a great part of Asia; and, in many places, altars were erected to him. So high had his reputation risen, within somewhat more than a century after his death, that one of the Roman emperors† placed him among his household gods, and offered him a species of worship along with Abraham, and Orpheus, and Christ, and others whom he esteemed as the most distinguished personages of the world.

Apollonius, we are informed, left some works be-

* It is known that the Romans had their augurs, a class of soothsaying priests whose office it was to collect, and publish, for the use of the state, the omens and oracles derived from birds.

† Alexander Severus, who was raised to the empire in the year of Christ 225.

hind him, which are now lost. The subject of one is said to have been *judicial astrology*, and of another, *the different things proper to be offered in sacrifice to different deities*. In some of his letters he speaks of the answers which he had received from several oracles, especially that of Trophonius. These circumstances alone are sufficient, with every thinking person, to destroy his reputation both as a philosopher and a man. Yet, being the only character whom the pagans, in their disputes with the christians, had to oppose to Jesus Christ, they studied with great pains, to magnify both his wisdom, and the prodigies he was said to perform.* But these prodigies, besides their extravagance, rest on very slender evidence. Most of them are related to have been performed in distant countries, in which his cotemporaries possessed no means of examining their truth; and the history of them was not compiled till long after his death. The posthumous honours which were paid him, were vague, and without any distinct object on which to fix the veneration of the people. He imparted to

* Eusebius the famous ecclesiastical historian informs us that Hierocles, a violent enemy of the christian religion, undertook to draw a comparison between Apollonius and Christ. This work of Hierocles is now lost; and its contents are known only by the fragments preserved in the treatise written by Eusebius to refute it.

mankind no divine instructions; he gave them no moral code; he effected no great revolution in religion, or in manners. Like the cœnotaphs of the Romans, they were merely empty memorials of a celebrated name, which endured for a time, and then passed into oblivion. All accounts of his life and actions are of the most dubious authority. That biographical sketch of them, which was the most full, but, at the same time, the most suspected, was drawn up by Philostratus,* from documents preserved by Damis, a native of Nineveh, and one of the disciples of this extraordinary, and almost crazed philosopher. The meagre chronicles of Damis were said to be compiled from memoirs written by Apollonius himself. These chronicles falling into the hands of the empress Julia,† who had conceived a high veneration for Apollonius, from the traditions she had heard concerning him, thought they were not worthy the great fame of the philosopher. She delivered them, therefore, to Philostratus, the sophist, with her injunctions to prepare from them a history more fitted to exalt the glory of so great a man. Such is the authenticity of the history of Apollonius, who has, by the enemies of religion, been audaciously

* See Bayle's dictionary, article Apollonius Tyanæus.

† The wife of Alexander Severus.

compared with the Saviour of the world. It is rather a novel than a history; a mere rhetorical effort to embellish the memoirs of a wandering *ascetic*, who was distinguished chiefly for his austere singularities. Damis, who collected the original materials out of which the whole narrative was composed, is acknowledged to have been a weak and credulous man; and to have mingled, with the memoirs of his master, many traditionary reports of wonders which he had performed in remote countries, and chiefly in India. Besides other reasons which impair the authenticity of this history, it was written more than a century after the death of the hero whom it celebrates, and at a great distance from the scene of his exploits, when there remained no witnesses of his actions, and where there were no means of investigating the truth. Mr. Bayle, in the short account he has written of Apollonius, after a larger one of Mr. De Tillemont, says: "it is not to be doubted that this history of Philostratus contains a thousand fabulous things."* Can any person, then, except a most determined enemy of christianity, ever think of putting these fictions in competition with the evangelic history of our blessed Saviour, and his holy apostles?

* Dict. ubi sup.

After this account of the principal of the pagan miracles which have been opposed to those of the sacred scriptures, it will be thought unnecessary, I presume, to go into a detail of others. As little necessary is it to follow Mr. Hume in the play^{of} his wit, and to point out the futility of those examples, between which, and the miracles of the gospel, he has insinuated, rather than proposed, a comparison; I mean the cure of a blind man at Alexandria by the emperor Vespasian; the restoration of a limb of one of the attendants at a church of Saragossa in Spain, so sneeringly related by the cardinal De Retz; and the cures performed, for a time, at the tomb of the Abbè Paris.*

The conclusion which I draw from the details in these last three lectures is the same with the principle with which I commenced; that a real miracle must be the work only of God; that miracles are adequate and infallible proofs of divine revelation, or of the authority and inspiration of a prophet; that the holy scriptures do not acknowledge any miracles the works of demons, or evil spirits; and that there is no proof, in pagan antiquity, or modern legend,

* See these subjects placed in their just light by Mr. Paley. Evidences of christianity, part 1st. Proposition 2d. chapter 2d.

of any operation of magic, or superstition, which bears the real character of a miracle, or deserves, in any respect, to be put in competition with the divine works of Moses and of Christ, of the prophets and apostles.

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LECTURE XII.

Of the Evidence of Prophecy. The Prophecy concerning
Ishmael.

HAVING treated of *miracles*, and the evidence which they give to divine revelation, and having obviated some of the principal objections to the validity of that evidence arising from mistaken constructions of the scriptures, or from the spurious pretences to supernatural powers by which impostors, in all ages, have endeavoured to excite the admiration, and beguile the confidence of the ignorant part of the world; I proceed to take a brief review of the next species of the direct evidence of revelation, which is prophecy.

The solicitude of mankind to anticipate the future, and to dive into their own or their country's destinies, gave rise to oracles, and augurs, and different kinds of divining, and soothsaying, among all the nations of antiquity. But their responses usually related to some immediate emergency of the state, or

of the individual consulting them, concerning which probable conjectures might be framed. For, it is well known that the priests who presided over the pagan oracles possessed the most ample means of obtaining accurate and extensive knowledge of the state and circumstances of all persons applying to them,* and were hence enabled frequently to make fortunate guesses concerning future events which were not very remote. But, in cases that, from their nature, were necessarily doubtful, the dexterous ambiguity of oracular responses has been at all times notorious. The prophecies of the sacred scriptures are of a quite different character. Simple and unambiguous, for the most part, in their expressions and their aim, they are not confined to pointing out the immediate fortunes of individuals, or the issues of enterprises recently undertaken; they do not respect merely those revolutions in the state of princes, and of nations, the causes of which are already visibly prepared; but looking forward to remote futurity, to which no human foresight could penetrate, they embrace the whole series of ages. Events near at hand

* Their great treasures enabled them to keep agents, and informers in every region whence devotees came to consult them; so that they were in possession of every kind of intelligence which could enable them to form their answers.

the inspired prophets often foretold for the instruction, the correction, and conviction of the existing generation. But, for the conviction of the most distant posterity, they have presented to our view a succession of events springing one from another, and reaching to the remotest periods of time, with so much clearness and definiteness of description as often to make prophecy only anticipated history. We have already seen many of the divine predictions verified through a succession of thousands of years, which lays a foundation for a firm unwavering expectation of the accomplishment of those which remain to be fulfilled. And it must, I think, be granted by every reasonable man, that the certain and undeniable accomplishment of clear and unequivocal prophecies of events which could not have been foreseen in the ordinary relations of cause and effect, are decisive demonstrations of the veracity and divine mission of a prophet, and of the supernatural illumination of his mind by the Spirit of God. For, who but God, who hath created all things, and arranged the whole system of divine providence, can see the end from the beginning?

In the different kinds of evidence by which it has pleased God to establish the truth of the gospel, he has given a new display of his wisdom, and of his

condescension in accommodating himself to the principles of our nature. To those who received the gospel in the first age, miracles were the best, and almost the only effectual proofs of its being a revelation from God. They carried with them immediate conviction. The fulfilment of prophecy would have had too slow and feeble an operation for a first impression calculated at once to seize and fix the mind. But, after divine truth, by the force of miracles, had taken possession of the understandings and the hearts of men, the gradual development of prophecy would serve to nourish and strengthen that persuasion, furnishing as it does, a growing and accumulated evidence to following generations. Miracles, from their nature, cannot be continued; but prophecy, unfolding itself more and more in successive periods of time, will have upon a serious and attentive mind, the operation of a constant miracle.

Many of the predictions of the ancient prophets had a peculiar and exclusive reference to the people of Israel, their internal state, and their various moral and political revolutions. The accomplishment of these predictions, while it verified the mission of those divine messengers, constantly confirmed the nation in the belief of the immediate superintendence of God over their national interests. But they carry

with them neither so deep an interest, nor so affecting a conviction to us who are far removed from the events. With regard to many other prophecies, the enemies of christianity, taking advantage of the difficulty which frequently occurs in history, of fixing with precision the dates of ancient facts, have dared, with their usual effrontery, to pronounce that they must have been written after the existence of events which they so clearly foretel. In the very brief elucidation of the evidence of our holy religion from prophecy, which I purpose to attempt in these lectures, I shall omit all prophecies of the former character, limited to the age in which the prophet lived, or to the age immediately following; and, in a word, all those limited to the interior concerns of the nation while they remained in their own land, where any collusion or unfairness could possibly be suspected. And, with respect to the latter, although the pretence of the prophecies being written by persons who lived posterior to the events which they relate, has been often, and most clearly refuted, and has been made even to strengthen the force of prophetic evidence; yet, that I may not, on one hand, lead you into historical details that might appear tedious, and, on the other, that no room for doubt may remain upon your minds, I shall direct your attention to such

only as by no dubiousness, or perversion of chronology can be rendered liable to this charge. It would, indeed, require volumes to unfold all the prophecies of this character, and to enter minutely into all the critical disquisitions, and to examine all the historical monuments which would be necessary in order to present them to you in their full light. I shall, therefore, confine myself to the illustration of a very few, the accomplishment of which may be said to be passing before our eyes; or which relate to the coming of the Saviour so long foretold by those holy men who were thought worthy by God to be the organs of his mercy to the ancient world.*

The first which I shall select for this purpose is the prophecy concerning the character and destinies of Ishmael, and of that great and powerful nation which, it was predicted, should spring from him. Ishmael is universally acknowledged to have been the progenitor of all the Arab tribes, who, to this day, hold him, and the patriarch Abraham his father, in the highest veneration. Hagar, his mother, had been exiled from the family of the patriarch through the indiscretion of her own conduct, and

* Those who desire to enter into a more extensive view of the prophecies of scripture will do well to consult the work of bishop Newton on this subject.

the just resentment of her offended mistress. Still, however, she was an object of Abraham's tenderness, and of the pity of heaven; and while she wandered in great anxiety and distress through the wilderness, *the angel of the Lord* appeared to console her; *I will multiply thy seed exceedingly*, saith he, *behold, thou shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael;* because the Lord hath heard thy affliction. And he will be a wild man; and his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.* The angel who speaks in the name of Jehovah, or, who was Jehovah himself, immediately adds: *Behold I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget; and I will make him a great nation.†*

The mode of expression here adopted by the sacred writer demonstrates that the whole prediction relates rather to the posterity of Ishmael, than to Ishmael himself. The Arabians, who acknowledge this patriarch for their progenitor, and glory in being derived through him from Abraham, a name venerated over all the east, early became a nume-

* That is, *God shall hear.* Gen. 16. 10. 12.

† *Ib.* v. 20.

rous people, according to the testimony of Moses, and have certainly been a *great nation* ever since there existed any authentic records of profane history. At present, they not only fill the vast peninsula included between the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, but are dispersed in innumerable hordes, and wandering troops, from Abyssinia to Syria, and from India to the western extremity of Africa. But the circumstances, which particularly demand attention in this prophecy, are, first, the *peculiar and unchanging character* of the nation; and secondly, the permanence of their national existence, and their unconquered independence, notwithstanding the perpetual revolutions of the nations which surround them, and the frequent attempts to subdue them which have been made by the greatest conquerors of the world. The prediction of the former is contained in these words: *He shall be a wild man, his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him*; that of the latter in the following: *And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren*. Let us briefly review each.

I. *He shall be a wild man*. Very expressive and descriptive is the original: *he shall be as a wild ass*; in his temper, his manners, and habits of living, resembling that fierce, vagrant, and untamed animal,

which is thus finely described in the book of Job: *Who hath sent out the wild ass free? And who hath loosed the bands of the wild ass? Whose house I have made the wilderness, and the barren lands his dwellings. He scorneth the multitude of the city; neither regardeth the crying of the driver. The range of the mountains is his pasture, and he searcheth after every green thing.** No words could better represent the mode of living of the greater part of the Arab tribes, who reside chiefly in sandy deserts, under movable tents, frequently wandering about in troops, in quest of a scanty subsistence. They are united among themselves in clans or hordes; but these are rather associations of freebooters, than orderly communities of men subsisting under any regular form of civil government. And in this wild, vagrant, and licentious state, they are ever ready to attack the commercial caravans, or armed troops of all nations. Thus engaged in perpetual hostilities; robbers by land, and pirates by sea, it is literally true that their hands are against all other men, and the hands of all other men are against them. They are not restrained by any apprehension of danger, or any principles of political caution, from attacking, in

* Job. 29. 5. &c.

flyiug parties, the greatest armies, trusting to the fleetness of their horses and the strong natural defences of their country. And they have not unfrequently been engaged in regular and solemn wars with the mightiest empires of the world.* Yet,

II. *They dwell in the presence of all their brethren.* This is the second branch of the prediction. Their country has not been overrun by any foreign power; their national existence has not been destroyed; they have maintained their independence and freedom against all the efforts which have been made to subdue them; and, while other empires have been overthrown in succession, and other nations have been merged in the conquering people so as no longer to be distinguished from them, the Arabians have, at all times, preserved a distinct and independent existence, unblended with any other race, and without any material change in their internal forms of government, or their national manners. *They dwell by themselves in the face of all their brethren,* notwithstanding the perpetual hostilities in which they have been engaged with almost the whole world.

* Frequent attempts were made to subdue them by the Egyptian first, and afterwards by the Assyrian, the Persian, the Macedonian, and the Roman empires.

Sesostris, though he carried his arms to India, and to Scythia, was obliged to draw a line from Heliopolis to Pelusium to defend Egypt from the incursions of the Arabians.* And Herodotus assures us that the Persians were never able to subdue that hardy race of men; on the other hand, they were obliged to court them, as, without their friendship and aid, the armies of the king could never have been able to enter Egypt. Alexander the great, provoked by the haughtiness of this people, who refused to send an embassy of congratulation to him, along with the embassies of the other nations of Asia, after the conquest of Persia, was preparing to chastise the affront, and meditated the conquest of the hitherto invincible Arabians, when he was arrested by death. Antigonus, the most powerful of his successors, carried the war into their territories; but his generals were shamefully defeated.† Which gave occasion to Diodorus Siculus to say: “neither the Assyrians formerly, nor the kings of the Medes and Persians, nor even the Macedonians, were able to subdue the Arabians. And, though they led against

* Diod. Sic. lib. 1. p. 36. edit. Stephan.

† Athenæus was first defeated. Demetrius was afterwards sent to wipe off his disgrace, and shared the same fate.

them numerous and mighty armies, they were utterly foiled in their designs of conquest.”*

The Romans, at last, when they became masters of the world, invaded them under a succession of their most illustrious captains, Lucullus, Pompey, *Ælius Gallus*, Trajan, Severus. And although they reduced to a temporary submission a few of the northern tribes, yet they were not able to make any permanent impression on the heart of the country; and these few intimidated hordes returned to their licentious independence as soon as the Roman armies were withdrawn.† At length, they became victors in their turn, and, under the name of Saracens, overran all the East, the north of Africa, and even part of Europe; and established one of the most powerful empires that ever existed. The Turks, who succeeded them in the East, were never able to im-

* Diod. Sic. lib. ii. p. 92. edit. Steph.

† If it be said that the Romans did not think the conquest of the barren country of Arabia, worth the risk and expense of subduing and holding in subjection such an active and impatient people, the effect on the verification of the prophecy is the same to whatever cause the independence and uniformity of state of that singular people may be ascribed. But it is not true that the barrenness of the soil renders it not worth the possession; for the southern portion of that great peninsula is among the most delightful countries on the globe, abounding in the richest productions of the south and east.

pose their yoke on Arabia. Still they exist independent; and still they exist a pure, and unmixed race. The ancient Assyrians, the ancient Persians, even the ancient Romans, can no longer be discriminated from the nations whom they conquered, or who vanquished them; but the Arabs have never been confounded with any other people: *they dwell by themselves in the presence of all their brethren*. All other nations, in the progress of society, have gradually changed their customs, their habits, their manners, their character. The greater part of the Arab tribes have ever remained the same; and the character of the father has distinguished his posterity through a series of four thousand years.

Who could have foreseen national fortunes, and national characters, so singular and peculiar, and at the same time, so permanent and unchangeable, contrary to whatever has been exhibited in the experience of all other nations, but the Spirit of God alone? God was tracing out to Abraham, his chosen servant, the destinies of his family by both his sons Isaac and Ishmael. In many circumstances they resemble one another, and differ from all the rest of mankind; and in none more than in an inflexible adherence to the customs of their ancestors; and in preserving themselves unmixed with other nations

while they dwell intermingled among them. But circumstances, but characteristics, but destinies so peculiar, so wholly unlike those of all other people; so little conformable to what our experience of the fates of nations would lead us to expect; and continued during so long a period of time beyond what the utmost penetration of human foresight, and sagacity could be supposed to reach, as they could be foreknown only by the infinite prescience of God, so they could have taken place only by the particular and immediate direction of his all ruling providence. And, surely, they furnish a testimony, of no inconsiderable authority, to the prophetic inspiration of the sacred writers. This will be not a little strengthened when we come, in the next lecture, to lay beside the prophecy concerning Ishmael, the kindred prediction concerning the destinies of the other branch of Abraham's family, in some respects so similar, but in others marked with such characteristic differences, as could be known to Him only who embraces all things at once in his omniscient view.

LECTURE XIII.

The Prophecy of Moses concerning the final Destruction of the Jewish Nation.

HAVING shown the exact and wonderful accomplishment of the prophecy which God condescended to impart to Abraham concerning the posterity of one of his sons. I shall, that I may not render this branch of the subject tedious, pass over other predictions not less surprising, relating to the nation of Israel who were descendants of another of his sons, to direct your attention to that only which was uttered by their great legislator, and prophet, near the close of his life. At that period when the devout and pious mind often becomes prophetic, the illapse of the divine Spirit on him appears to have been unusually clear and strong. After proposing to this people the highest motives to duty, and multiplying to them the most gracious promises of prosperity if they should continue obedient to the laws which God had given them by him, he carries his view far

forward into future ages, and, foreseeing the general defection of the nation from the true spirit of their religion, he denounces the most fearful judgments of heaven upon their disobedience and impiety. And then, tracing their destinies to the end of time, he delineates them with such clearness and circumstantial exactness, that, if we may judge of the future by the past for more than three thousand years, he seems to present a history rather than a prophecy. So terrible are these denunciations that nothing but the strongest sense of duty, and the most submissive obedience to the command of God, could have extorted them from the legislator, and father of his people: and so peculiar are these destinies that nothing but that infinite prescience, which embraces all things, from the beginning to the end, under one view, could have declared them so many ages before they existed.

The prophecy to which I refer is contained in the twenty eighth and thirtieth chapters of the book of Deuteronomy. I shall recite only such portions of it as are necessary to the object of the present lecture, which is to point out the final extinction of the civil government, and national existence of the Jews; the miseries which accompanied their political death; and their consequent, and continued dispersion

among all the nations of the world. *The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle that flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; a nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor show favour to the young.* And he shall besiege thee in all thy gates, until thy high and fenced walls come down wherein thou trustedst, throughout all thy land. And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons, and of thy daughters in the siege, and in the straitness wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee; so that the man who is tender among you, and very delicate, his eye shall be evil toward his brother, and toward the wife of his bosom, and toward the remnant of the children that he shall leave; so that he shall not give to any of them of the flesh of his children which he shall eat; because he shall have nothing left him in the siege, and in the straitness wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee in all thy gates. The tender and delicate woman among you, who would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil toward the husband of her bosom, and toward her son,*

* &c. Ch. 28. v. 52.

and toward her daughter, and toward her young infant, even toward her children which she shall bear: for she shall eat them for want of all things, secretly, in the siege and straitness wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee in all thy gates. And it shall come to pass that ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people from one end of the earth, even to the other. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease; neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest.† And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing, and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee, and shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; that then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee.*

Every thing in this prophecy is astonishing; and if we seriously and attentively consider it in all its

* Ch. 28. v. 63, &c.

† Ch. 30. v. 1—3.

parts, it carries with it irrefragable evidence of its having been dictated by the omniscient Spirit of God. The minuteness and accuracy of the detail is hardly exceeded by the history of the events. The events themselves are so singular and unexampled, that a pretended prophet, vending only probable conjectures, or ambiguous oracles, for prophecy, never would have conceived, or ventured to utter them. And if he had been so bold, there are infinite chances against one that words thrown out in random guesses should never coincide with the current of future history. That a nation, in a course of time, should degenerate from her primitive manners, and, at length, be subjugated by some powerful conqueror, is an event so much in the order of nature, that it requires no great portion of political sagacity to predict it in general terms. But who could foresee at so great a distance, that the Jews would perish precisely in such a manner; that their sieges would be so dreadful; that the remnant, who should escape the famine and the sword, should be dispersed through all nations, where, renewing their numbers, they should still continue a distinct people, and capable, on their repentance, of being again restored to a national and independent state in their own land? This is surely the foresight of inspiration.

The people of Israel were under a peculiar providence. While they continued obedient to the law of God given them by Moses, they enjoyed distinguished temporal happiness and prosperity. But their departures from the law of their God, their idolatries, and their general defection to immorality and impiety were always punished with marked and severe chastisements. And it was announced to them that, when these temporary inflictions should fail to produce the effectual correction and reformation of their manners, the judgments of heaven should fall upon them with more dreadful severity; that, after suffering all the most grievous calamities of war, the miserable remnants of the sword should be exiled from their desolated country, and scattered as vagabonds over the whole earth, being subjected to every privation and indignity, till the appointed period, for the expiation of their sins, should bring them to repentance, and open the way for their restoration to their own land.

Let us now see how literally these denunciations have been verified, especially, at two great epochs, the Babylonish captivity; and the destruction of Jerusalem, and dispersion of the Jews, under the Roman emperor Vespasian. In the siege which preceded both the one captivity, and the other, this

people suffered almost unheard of calamities. As their privileges had been greater than those of other nations, their iniquities seem to have risen in the same proportion. Having rejected with scorn the warnings of those divine messengers sent to them by God, they appear to have been abandoned by him to an infatuated mind, agitated by the most ferocious passions. Their miseries, instead of humbling their pride, or calming their madness, rendered them only more furious; and their enemies themselves, in the midst of fire and slaughter, sometimes looked on them with commiseration and astonishment as a people marked out for the peculiar vengeance of heaven. And the recital of their sufferings, particularly in the destruction of their city by the Romans,* which seems to have been chiefly in the view of their prophetic legislator, is perhaps without a parallel in the history of human misery.

And he shall besiege thee in all thy gates, continues the prophecy, *until thy high and fenced walls come*

* The description of the conquering nation carries in it a striking application to the Romans. *The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from AFAR, from the END OF THE EARTH, as swift as an eagle that flieth; a nation whose TONGUE thou shalt NOT UNDERSTAND, &c.* The language of Chaldea was not so unintelligible to the Hebrews as that of the Romans; nor was Babylon so distant from Jerusalem as Rome.

down wherein thou trustedst, throughout all thy land.

And it deserves to be remarked of the Jewish nation, more, perhaps, than of any other, that their calamities have been the consequence, not so much of unfortunate conflicts in the open field, as of desperate and disastrous sieges, in which the greater portion of the people, being shut up within their walls, suffered whatever famine and civil discord inflamed by the most furious and fanatical passions, not less than the sword of the enemy, could inflict upon the most miserable of mankind. The history of the miseries which they suffered in the respective sieges is calculated to inspire us with horror, and perfectly accords with the strong painting of the prophecy. Passing over the destruction of their city, and the captivity of their nation by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, I shall only present you with a brief sketch of their last overthrow, the most fearful scene of their calamities, in the famous siege of Jerusalem by Titus, the son, and lieutenant of Vespasian. The materials of this representation I draw entirely from Josephus, himself a Jew, and cotemporary with the transactions which he relates, who could have no motive to exaggerate the madness, and the atrocious passions of his own countrymen.

In the various towns of Judea besieged and taken by the Romans during this desolating and exterminating war, their furious and exasperated soldiers cut off the whole population without respecting either age or sex. They showed themselves, in the words of Moses, to be *a nation of a fierce countenance*, rendered more ferocious by the fury with which they were opposed, *who regarded not the person of the old, nor showed favour to the young*. But it was in the siege of Jerusalem itself that the measure of the calamities of the Jews became full. Pressed from without by all the arts of war, and cut off entirely from supplies of provisions, it was difficult to say whether hunger, or the sword destroyed the greater numbers. Their distresses were doubly aggravated by their own internal dissensions. Divided into most violent factions by ambitious or enthusiastic leaders, they often filled the streets of Jerusalem with mutual slaughter. Often they only suspended their own conflicts for a short season to run to their walls to resist the assaults of the common enemy; and returned from repulsing them to butcher one another. It seemed as if heaven had smitten the murderers of the Saviour of the world with a desperate phrenzy, and given them up to the dominion of the most diabolical passions. In the midst of all these horrors

famine presents us with a spectacle still more horrible, when we see them, driven by the rage of hunger, with cannibal appetite, to devour one another, and the living feeding on those who had died of disease, or of wounds. Even mothers, quenching all the sentiments of nature, devoured their own children, and grudging to their husbands, and their other children a share in this dreadful repast, they endeavoured, after having satisfied the present cravings of their own hunger, to conceal the remaining fragments from the voracious rapacity of the rest of the family, reserving them as a precious morsel against another time. With what fearful accuracy has the prediction of Moses been fulfilled! *And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons, and thy daughters, in the siege, and in the straitness wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee; so that the man who is tender among you and very delicate,* his eye shall be evil toward his brother, and toward the wife of his bosom, and toward the remnant of the children that he shall leave, so that he shall not give*

* That is, who has been most softly and luxuriously bred, and accustomed to the choicest viands, he shall now be reduced to these wretched and horrible meals. And even of these he shall grudge the smallest share to those who were once most dear to him, when the furious rage of hunger had not perverted all his affections.

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to any of them of the flesh of his children which he shall eat. The tender and delicate woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness, and tenderness, her eye shall be evil toward the husband of her bosom, and toward her son, and toward her daughter, and toward her young infant, even toward her children that she shall bear; for she shall eat them for want of all things, secretly, in the siege.

One example, out of many of the same kind, let me produce to show the frantic despair with which this devoted people hastened their own destruction. After the storming of Jerusalem, a wretched remnant of the citizens sought refuge in the castle of Massada: but, being pressed by the Romans, they, at the instigation of one of their leaders, first murdered their wives and children: they then chose by lot ten who should murder all the rest; after which one of the ten was chosen to murder the other nine; who, when he had executed this dreadful office, stabbed himself. In this manner perished nine hundred and sixty persons in this single fortress.* And, in the whole war there were destroyed by the Romans, by famine, and by their own hands, upwards of twelve hundred thousand persons, besides nearly

* Jos. de bell. Jud. lib. 7. cap. 8, 9.

one hundred thousand who were taken prisoners and sold for slaves.* Of these prisoners so little care was taken that eleven thousand were literally starved to death; and, of the remainder, the greater portion were sent as slaves to Egypt, agreeably to another part of the same prophecy: *And the Lord shall bring thee into Egypt with ships, and there ye shall be sold to your enemies for bond men, and bond women; and no man shall buy you.*† In such numbers shall you be brought to the market, that purchasers, at length, will no longer be found.

So conformable was this disastrous termination of the Jewish state, and destruction of the holy city, to the predictions both of Moses, and of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: *For, then, there shall be great tribulation, saith Christ, such as was not from the*

* Accurately, according to Josephus the dead were 1,240,490; and the prisoners 99,200.

† Ch. 28. v. 68. *The Lord shall bring thee into Egypt with ships.* The people of Israel came out of Egypt by the isthmus of Suez, and the desert. And, by that route they usually travelled and traded to that country. But it was more convenient for the Romans to put their numerous slaves on board the ships belonging to their fleet, or on board Phenician merchant vessels, to transport them into Egypt. As this was a mode of communication not practised in the time of Moses, and commerce was in a great measure interdicted to the Israelites by their institutions, this circumstance renders this part of the prophecy the more surprising, and worthy our attention: *that they should come into Egypt in ships.*

*beginning of the world to this time, no nor ever shall be; and except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved.**

Let us pursue the prophecy farther: *And it shall come to pass that ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from one end of the earth even to the other. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest.* Here is a new series of wonders. That a nation should be conquered, that it should be reduced to subjection, that it should be wholly exterminated by some barbarous conqueror, would not be so extraordinary; because the history of the world affords numerous examples of similar events. But, that a whole people should be *plucked from off their land*, should be dispersed in broken fragments through all the nations of the world, and yet neither be blended with those nations, nor become extinct, is a catastrophe so singular, a state so unprecedented, that a prophet who was not uttering a prediction dictated by the divine Spirit, an historian who should have been only hazarding a conjecture or a random oracle, never would have thought of one which no fact in history

* Mat. 24. 21, 22. See the prediction of our Saviour beautifully illustrated by bishop Porteus in his lecture upon this chapter.

ever could have suggested, which no experience of the revolutions of nations ever could have warranted. If, in the infinite combinations of the operations of providence, an oracle, in a long course of time, might accidentally hit upon one corresponding event, is it within the compass of possibility that either random conjecture, or the most sagacious human foresight, should be able to foretel, and accurately to point out, such a united series of facts, continued down through such a long succession of ages? The man, who can receive this as either probable or possible, must have a great facility of believing indeed. Do we not, then, see the Jewish nation *plucked from off their own land*? Do we not see them *scattered among all people from one end of the earth even unto the other*? And is it not true that, *among all these nations they find no ease; neither is there rest for the sole of their foot*? Perpetually they have been persecuted, insulted, pillaged, and refused all the common privileges of citizenship. In every country we have seen them alternately banished and recalled; and recalled only to be pillaged, or banished again. The whole history of that afflicted people since their dispersion confirms the words of their great prophet: that they should *become an astonishment, a proverb*,

and a byword among all nations. That their plagues should be wonderful, even great plagues and of long continuance.†*

A circumstance not a little singular, which has contributed more than all others both to their dispersion, and to the injuries which they have suffered, is that, in almost all countries, they have been denied the privilege of holding landed property. This has induced a necessity, contrary to the original habits of the nation, to turn their attention to commerce, and to the discount, and exchange of money in different forms. Hence has resulted the further necessity of distributing themselves as traders, and brokers or bankers, into various nations. Their wealth, accumulated by these means, excited both the envy of the people, and the avarice of their rulers, and pointed them out as an easy prey to violent and arbitrary princes, whenever the public coffers were empty. The extreme uncertainty of their state tempted them to demand usurious interest in their contracts for money lending. Hence the public hatred, in every country was inflamed against them, and justified, in the public esteem, the rapacity and violence of the princes who oppressed them. A thousand wicked and malicious tales were fabricated against

* Deut. 28. 37.

† Ib. v. 59.

them. A thousand crimes were imputed to them; and they were often given up to the fanatical rage of the populace. Thus has their character been in a great measure formed by their state, and their persecutions have often sprung out of their character. This, together with the barbarous superstition, and the barbarous forms of civil government which, for many ages disgraced Europe, completed their misery.

On a review of this history, may I not justly demand again, who could have foreseen national characteristics, and situations so uncommon, so singular: circumstances so various and complicated, destined to take place in such remote ages, but the Spirit of God alone? In order to evade the almost irresistible evidence of this conclusion, we have seen infidel writers resort to the ridiculous subterfuge of saying that the verification of the prediction is to be ascribed to the christians who have ingeniously contrived to give authenticity to their own scriptures, by promoting the fulfilment of their prophecies. But have not these prophecies been fulfilled under the dominion of pagan and mahometan nations, as well as of the christian? If the allegation, however, were well founded, whence could Moses have foreseen the existence of the christian religion, and the interest which the christians, as a sect, would have in

giving effect to his own prophecy? Whence could he have foreseen those commercial, political, moral, and religious institutions, which, by their influence on the character of the nations who should embrace christianity, would thus cruelly affect the condition of the Jews? Surely, if men were not blinded by their prejudices, they would see that the wonder here, is not in the least diminished by this absurd supposition.

With equal folly and ignorance it has been alleged that this prediction was composed by Ezra, or some of his countrymen, after the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity; that it has a relation solely to that event; and that hence alone we must account for the very circumstantial narration of several particulars during the siege, and the exact delineation of the consequent state of the nation.

Men who undertake to write and pronounce upon the subject of religion, without the trouble of candidly inquiring into its truth, seem to think themselves entitled to make, without shame or compunction, the most extravagant and improbable assertions. This allegation is demonstrated to be utterly impossible by reference only to the Samaritan copy of the pentateuch.* This ancient book,

* Ten tribes of the people of Israel withdrew themselves from the government of the house of Solomon under the reign of Re-

which contains the whole law of Moses, was continually read in the religious assemblies of that people, so hostile to the Jews, during a period of four hundred years anterior to the capture of Jerusalem by the king of Babylon, and still longer before the age of Ezra, and the copy of the scriptures collected by that emi-

nent. In their separation they still professed to adhere to the law of Moses which had been common to the whole nation. The five books, therefore, which were written by him, and which contained his whole law, they preserved with no less veneration than did the Jews. When the ten tribes were led into captivity by the kings of Babylon they were replaced by a new and mixed race called Samaritans, from the name of their capital city Samaria. These people, residing in the land of Israel, and mixing with the remnant of its former inhabitants, still received the law of Moses as their civil, and religious code; but admitted none of the writings of the Jewish prophets. Perpetual hatreds, and a most hostile spirit, always existed between the revolted tribes first, and afterwards the Samaritans, and the people of the Jews. Both nations preserved the law of Moses with the same sacredness. The language is the same. But the Jewish copy of the law is written in the Chaldee character which became familiar to the Jews during their captivity at Babylon; the Samaritan is written in the old Hebrew, or Phenician letter, which was common to the whole nation before the captivity. This is that which is called the Samaritan pentateuch. And this old letter, in which the law is preserved by them, is another proof of the antiquity of the Samaritan copy. It is doubtless the letter which Moses himself used, and communicated to the people of Israel. And the Jews changed it, in their copies of the law after the captivity, for the Chaldee, only because the latter, by a long residence in Babylon, had become more familiar to them.

nent scribe. Here then is a copy of the Mosaic law, retained in the hands of rivals and of enemies, which renders it of the more unsuspected credit, that demonstrates the existence of the prophecy several centuries before the era of the Babylonish captivity. But the prophecy contains the evidence within itself that its principal reference is to the Roman conquest, and to the state of the Jews since that period. It is a miracle then continually presented to your eyes: it is a prophecy every day fulfilling in your sight after a lapse of more than three thousand years.

LECTURE XIV.

Predictions concerning Tyre, Egypt, and Babylon.

NOTHING would be more easy than to multiply examples of the fulfilment of prophecy; as may be seen in the elaborate works of bishop Newton and of various other writers, who have illustrated, with great learning and evidence, the numerous and interesting predictions of the holy scriptures. But, confining your view, at present, within the narrow limits which I have prescribed to myself, I shall further offer to your attention in this lecture, only the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, concerning the various destinies of Tyre, Egypt, and Babylon.

To these celebrated kingdoms, while they were yet in all their glory, the prophets announced the fearful judgments which impended over them from God, and which would at length overwhelm them in utter ruin. That these great and flourishing nations, after having reached the summit of prosperity, should decline and fall; that their manners should become

effeminate, and their vigor be enervated by a fatal luxury created by their prosperity itself; and that they should, at length, be subdued by some more hardy and barbarous tribes, or some more powerful empire, would have been events not beyond the penetration of human wisdom to have foreseen. It required not the spirit of prophecy to predict that Tyre, in the revolution of ages, would lose the wealth and magnificence to which she had risen by the possession of the greater portion of the commerce of the world; that Egypt must sink from that preeminent rank to which her learning, her arts, and her arms had elevated her; and that the empire of the east must, at length, be wrested from the pride and power of Babylon. But that which is most worthy of observation, and most clearly demonstrates the inspiration of the holy prophets is, not merely a general prediction of this kind, inferred from the uniform history of past ages, but the precision, and minuteness with which they describe events so far sunk in future time, and the peculiarity of the destiny which they foretel for each nation, and which distinguishes it from that of every other people. Here we discern a prescience extending far beyond the field of human foresight, or conjecture.

While Tyre was yet in all the splendor of her power, and every wind was bringing into her port the riches of all the countries of the then known world, the prophet Ezekiel denounced the judgments which threatened her from God in the following terms: *I will make thee a terror, and thou shalt be no more: though thou be sought for, yet thou shalt never be found again, saith the Lord God. I will make thee like the top of a rock: thou shalt be a place to spread nets upon; thou shalt be built no more; for I the Lord have spoken it, saith the Lord God.** Here it is foreseen, and declared by that divine Spirit which spoke in the prophets, that this great emporium of the ancient world, should not merely lose her commercial superiority over other nations; should not merely be reduced to subjection by some conqueror of the east; but that she should be so utterly destroyed as to become, at length, only a miserable retreat for a few poor fishermen. Her harbours, once crowded with navies, should be choked up, so as hardly to admit some small fishing vessels; and her magnificent villas, beautiful gardens, and cultivated grounds, the fruits, and the monuments of her wealth and luxury, should exhibit only naked rocks,

* Ezek. 26th, 21st, 14th. See also the 26th, 27th, and 28th chapters of this prophet, and the 23d of Isaiah.

from which the neglected soil washed by the rains and floods should leave nothing but a convenient station for drying the nets of the few solitary fishermen who might still seek among the ruins a refuge from the storms of the sea, or a retreat from the labours of their occupation. The language of the prophecy is strong and picturesque: *I will scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock. And thou shalt be a place to spread nets upon.** And the representations which modern travellers have given of the site and present state of Tyre, once so famous in the annals of the world, most strikingly verify the predictions of the inspired writers concerning the utter desolation of that great city. And the inspiration of these holy men is confirmed by the exact correspondence of the event to the prophecy. Hue-tius, in his *demonstration of the gospel*, quotes the testimony, and the reflection of a learned and judicious man on this subject who had resided long in Syria. "When I approached, said he, the ruins of Tyre, and beheld the rocks running out into the sea, and the vast stones dispersed every where along the shore, rendered naked and smooth by the sun, the waves, and the winds; so that they seemed to be

* Verses 5th, 21st.

only convenient places for drying fishermen's nets, many of which happened, at the time I visited it, to be spread out upon them, the whole scene brought to my mind the prophecy of Ezekiel concerning that city: *I will make thee like the top of a rock; thou shalt be a place to spread nets upon; thou shalt be built no more; for I the Lord have spoken it, saith the Lord God.*"*

I shall only further quote the description given of the same subject by that careful and accurate traveller Mr. Maundrell. "This city, says he, standing in the sea upon a peninsula, promises at a distance something very magnificent. But, when you come to it, you find no similitude of that glory for which it was so renowned in ancient times, and which the prophet Ezekiel describes, chap. 26, 27, 28. On the north side it has an old Turkish ungarrisoned castle; besides which you see nothing here but a mere Babel of broken walls, pillars, vaults, &c. there being not so much as one entire house left. Its present inhabitants are only a few poor wretches harbouring themselves in the vaults, and subsisting chiefly upon fishing, who seem to be preserved in this place by divine providence as a visible argument, how God

* Huet. Demon. evan. prov. 6.

has fulfilled his word concerning Tyre, that *it should be as the top of a rock; a place for fishers to dry their nets.*"*

If we turn our eyes, in the next place, to Egypt we discern a striking dissimilarity between the fate of that most ancient kingdom, and that either of Tyre, or of Babylon. A fate, however, which has been most exactly pointed out by the prophet; but which could never have been anticipated by any degree of political sagacity, or by any knowledge of the course of human events collected from the past history of the world. Egypt, says the sacred writer, Egypt, the seat of letters, of arms, and of all the arts of civilized life; Egypt, whither all nations resort for instruction in every branch of knowledge; and where human nature, as well as human science, is supposed to have attained its highest excellence; *Egypt, most contrary to every present appearance, and to every reasonable conclusion drawn from its present character and state, shall become a base kingdom; it shall be the basest of 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; and there shall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt.*† He

* Maundrell, page 48.

† Ezek. 29th, 14th, 15th, and 30th, 12th.

does not say of Egypt, as of the kingdom of Tyre or of Babylon, that it shall be utterly destroyed, or that it shall no more have a name, or an existence. It shall exist; but in such a degenerate state that it shall become the basest of kingdoms. It shall be subjected to the tyranny of one nation after another, and no more have a native prince to rule over it, till, deprived of all independence and nobleness of spirit, and sunk into that ignorance, and abject servility which is the natural consequence of subjection to a foreign despotism, it become, in effect, the most debased and contemptible of all the nations who once enjoyed preeminent power and glory.

This prophetic picture is, upwards of five hundred years afterwards, verified by Strabo, Juvenal, Hirtius, and most of the ancient writers of that period, who treat of the affairs of the Egyptians. And, according to the narrations of modern travellers most worthy of credit, who have visited that servile country, the inhabitants, and especially the descendants of the primitive race, have become only more degenerate by time. Through a long course of ages they have been delivered over from the dominion of the Persians to that of the Greeks, and, in succession, to the Romans, the Saracens, the Mamelukes, and the Turks, till they have utterly lost all those manly and

noble characteristics which, in the age of the prophet, were the glory of their ancestors.*

Let us now attend to the strain of the divine denunciations against Babylon, that city, the most mighty and magnificent in the ancient world, which had extended its empire over all the east; the deep foundations, the immense towers, and impregnable walls of which, seemed as if they might bid defiance to the power of time itself. *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; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs† shall*

* The Copts, in particular, the supposed descendants of the primitive inhabitants of that country, are represented by all writers as being, in their manners, habits, and sentiments, among the most ignorant, filthy, pusillanimous, faithless and vicious, of the human race. See Pococke; Description of the East, vol. 1. book 4. ch. 4. p. 177, &c. Thevenot in Harris's collection, vol. 2. ch. 8. p. 429. with whom every other writer agrees. The character above described is said to be applicable to the Egyptians generally, but especially to the Copts.

† It is uncertain what species of creature is intended by the Hebrew term Searim, translated Satyrs, but probably, it signifies some animal of the goat kind.

dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces. And her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged.†*

Here is a series of wonderful predictions depending for their accomplishment on events so remote, so accidental, and out of the ordinary course of things, that no wisdom could have foreseen them but that of the divine Spirit which spoke in the prophets? That great city, "the greatest," says Pausanias, "that ever the sun shone upon," was to be utterly destroyed, so as not to leave a vestige remaining of its ancient grandeur. And the means by which it was to perish were so little to be expected, as still more to increase our admiration of that divine prescience with which the prophet was inspired. Cyrus the Persian, two hundred years after the age of Isaiah, invaded Babylon, but, unable to penetrate its impregnable walls, he determined to divert the stream of the Euphrates which ran through the middle of the city. For this purpose, he formed, with immense

* Dragons, that is, great animals of the serpent or lizard kind, and these being united with *wild beasts of the islands*, point out such noxious and loathsome creatures as usually inhabit vast and dreary morasses, on the borders of great rivers, especially in warm latitudes.

† Isaiah 13th, 19th, 22d

labour, a prodigious excavation, or artificial basin in the earth, into which he turned the river, his army, in the mean time, entering the city through the channel deserted by its waters. Babylon being taken in this manner, it appears that the river could never be perfectly restored to its ancient bed. The diverted waters gradually converted the adjacent country into an extensive morass. This effect was greatly increased by the neglect of the Persian, and Syro-Grecian kings, who, building Susa, Ctesiphon and Seleucia in the neighbourhood, withdrew their care, and attracted the inhabitants from the capital of the Chaldee empire, to augment the population, and the glory of these favourite seats of their residence. Thus was the desolation of that mighty city commenced, which continually increased till, at length, only *satyrs danced in her deserted streets, and dragons, and wild beasts of the islands, and every doleful creature inhabited her desolate houses, and her pleasant palaces*. But who could foresee this train of causes and events, so improbable at the period when the prophet wrote, and which required so many ages to its ultimate accomplishment; who could have so distinctly marked the destiny of Babylon, which was so different from that of Egypt, or Tyre, or of any other city or nation, but that omniscient Spirit who

looks through all the revolutions of time at a single glance?

What chiefly strikes us with surprise in this prophecy, and strengthens the argument we draw from it, is the complete annihilation of every trace of a city which seemed to have been built for eternity; and the peculiar appearance of that desolate region, consisting partly of barren sand, and partly of deep morass, that distinguishes the probable site whereon Babylon stood, which is plainly pointed out by the sacred writer, and must have been prepared, and accomplished by causes so entirely beyond the sphere of human foresight.

As the pyramids and obelisks of Egypt still exist in our days; as the site of the Egyptian Thebes, a city of the remotest antiquity is even yet to be traced by the majestic ruins* which have been discovered in the midst of an immense desert, it might have been expected that some monument of Babylonian magnificence would likewise have shown us where

* Extended rows of lofty and noble columns, and other remains of magnificent edifices have, not many years since, been discovered in Upper Egypt, in the probable site of the ancient Thebes, or Heliopolis. They are covered with hieroglyphic characters in alto-relievo, cut out of the solid rock, and now so indurated by time, and the action of the atmosphere, that, it is said, no chisel can make an impression upon them.

the capital of the East once stood. But, notwithstanding the solidity and grandeur which its structures are said to have possessed, not a vestige, according to the predictions of the prophets, is now to be found of those walls which were thought to be proof against the assaults of time, of those hanging gardens, which ancient historians tell us, appeared like lofty mountains, or of that famous tower *whose top*, it is said, was designed to be *raised to heaven*.*

* Quintus Curtius makes the circumference of Babylon 368 furlongs. This, according to the computation of some writers is forty six, and of others sixty English miles. The same historian makes the altitude of the walls 150 feet; Strabo, however, speaks of them as being only seventy five feet. But this writer lived when Babylon had fallen greatly into decline. And Herodotus, who flourished long before both Strabo and Curtius, and while Babylon was yet in its glory, declares their height to be 300 feet, and their breadth eighty seven. Quint. Curt. lib. 5. cap. 1. Strabo. lib. 16. p. 738. Herod. lib. 1. cap. 183. See also Usher's Annals, A. M. 3526.

From these dimensions we may conjecture the elevation and solidity of that tower which the Babylonians are said to have attempted to rear to heaven. If it were only as high as their walls, this design might have been imputed to them without any very strained figure. But perhaps the real intention of that magnificent, but superstitious people has been generally mistaken. It cannot be reasonably imagined that they ever entertained the visionary idea of actually climbing to heaven, or of escaping, as has been supposed, a future deluge; but as they were laying the foundations of an empire destined, in their proud imagination, to extend over the whole earth, it appears that they wished to esta-

Even the place on which Babylon stood can be only conjectured by the reeds and marshes which cover a large district along the banks of the Euphrates above its junction with the Tigris, and by the wild beasts, and every species of venomous reptiles which inhabit them. Mr. Salmon, speaking on this subject,

blish a capital the grandeur of which should correspond with the greatness of their political views, and become the centre of their union, and their power. It was the impious pride and selfsufficiency of this enterprise which so highly offended the Almighty, as well as the danger which must result to the happiness of mankind from the successful establishment of such an extensive despotism. He therefore confounded their design. The tower was probably devoted to the purposes of idolatry; as it appears to have resembled in its form many structures which have been discovered by late travellers through various nations of the East, the tops of which have evidently been consecrated to the worship of the *perpetual fire*, as a symbol of the sun, or of that animating principle of light and heat which pervades and vivifies all nature, which is known to have been the universal idolatry of Chaldea, and of Persia almost from the earliest times. Those temples, or turrets, are commonly constructed of eight stories gradually diminishing in their diameter as they ascend; the whole surmounted by a dome with apertures towards different quarters of the heavens. In many of these domes are evident appearances of altars, and marks of the fire which once burnt on them.

This similitude of structure, then, compared with the narrations of the Greek historians, may suggest to us the probable destination of the tower of Babel, for which it has been thought so difficult to furnish any reasonable account. For when the Babylonians were founding the metropolis of an immense empire which, according to their ambitious designs, was to embrace the

says, " what is as strange as any thing that is related of Babylon is, that we cannot learn, either by ancient writers, or by modern travellers, where this famous city stood, only, in general, that it was situated in the province of Chaldea, upon the river Euphrates."

whole universe, no idea was more natural, in that age especially, when religion always stood next the throne, and often united the power of the throne with itself, than that of making the grandeur of their religious institutions correspond with the grandeur of their imperial city, and their empire. They might hope also, to promote the union of the state, and the peaceable submission of the people to the laws, by employing, for this purpose, all the majesty of religion, or, if you please, all the influence of superstition, and by directing, as Moses, and the Egyptians afterwards did, their religious veneration to one common centre in the capital. Considering the tower of Babylon in this view, we shall have no difficulty in believing that it was the same which was afterwards called by the Greeks the temple of Belus; giving, according to their custom, a Greek termination to the Chaldee term Baal, or Bel, which signifies the sun. This agrees likewise with the sacred text, for the following is the literal version of the original: *Let us make us a tower, whose top may be—to heaven.* And here it is certainly more natural to insert the word *consecrated* than *reach*, which has been interpolated in our translation. The meaning, therefore, will be, *Let us make a tower corresponding with the loftiness and grandeur of the city, whose summit shall be devoted to the worship of heaven:* a name often put for the heavenly bodies, and especially the sun, the principal object of eastern idolatry; of which the fire that was kept perpetually burning in the upper stages, or domes of these turrets, was intended as a symbol.

If it is extraordinary that such a city should have so totally disappeared from the face of the earth, it is not less extraordinary that the singular state of desolation, in which it was predicted that Babylon should lie, should have been so exactly foretold, when the cause which contributed principally to effect it, and which has been already stated, had not begun to operate till more than two centuries after the age of the prophet, and had not produced its ultimate consequences till after the third century of the christian era.

If the prophet, as I have said before, had been guided merely by human conjecture or foresight, he would probably have framed his predictions in such general terms as would have been applicable only to that state of decline and ruin into which all cities and empires, in the course of ages necessarily fall. He would not have entered into details so minute and distinctive concerning the destruction of these nations, involving the means by which it should be effected, and the consequent and peculiar state of desolation in which each should lie. Nothing is calculated more certainly to betray ignorance, or detect imposture, than such particularity, when men are not guided by a divine and infallible illumination. But, when we see the prophetic destinies of nations so

varied, and yet, in their minutest circumstances, so exactly fulfilled, can scepticism itself, or the most determined infidelity, have the hardihood to suppose that so many, and such extraordinary coincidences between predictions and events, continued down through more than five and twenty centuries may have been merely the result of accident? On the other hand, is it not infinitely more reasonable to believe that they can only have proceeded from the inspiration of that divine Spirit, who surveys all nature, and embraces all time, at a single view?*

* "A series of ages was necessary to give this prophecy [referring to the prophecy concerning Babylon] its full accomplishment. And, if we carefully follow the stream of history, we shall find that a series of ages has completely verified the awful menaces of the prophet." Kett on Prophecy. p. 139.

Cyrus began the destruction of Babylon by removing the seat of empire to Susa; but especially by diverting the waters of the river to facilitate his entrance into the city. By their overflowing, and consequent stagnation, the whole country became unwholesome, and degenerated into an extensive morass. The depopulation of Babylon which was begun by Cyrus, was greatly increased by the successors of Alexander building Seleucia and Ctesiphon in its neighbourhood. The Parthian kings who followed these completed its ruin. Strabo the historian, who flourished six centuries after Cyrus, relates that a great part of the city, once so splendid, was become a mere desert. Pausanias, who wrote and travelled in the third century after Christ, says, "Of Babylon, the greatest city the sun ever shone upon, nothing now remains but some of its walls." Later travellers have not been able to find even the ruins of those walls; while wild beasts, venomous, or ferocious animals, infest all the country.

I cannot conclude this lecture better than by repeating the reflections of ~~bishop~~ Newton, after quoting the narrations of different travellers into the East, and their conjectures with regard to the situation of the ancient Babylon. " By these accounts, says he, we see how punctually time hath fulfilled the predictions of the prophets concerning Babylon. When it was converted into a chase for wild beasts to feed and breed there, then were exactly accomplished the words of the prophet, that *the wild beasts of the desert, with the wild beasts of the islands should dwell there, and cry in their desolate houses*.* One part of the country was overflowed by the river being turned out of its course, and never restored again to its former channel. Thence it became boggy and marshy so that it might literally be said to be a pos-

* The kings of Persia, about the time of the emperor Theodosius, converted the grounds on which Babylon stood into a chase for their amusement in hunting, the remains of the ancient walls of the city forming, at that time, an inclosure for the royal park. But while *the wild beasts of the desert* ranged over one part of the ground, *the wild beasts of the islands*, or such as usually inhabit waters and morasses, occupied the remainder. A new proof of the particularity of the prophecy; that one part of the site of that vast city should be deluged with waters, and sunk in marshes; while another part, exempted from the encroachment of the waters turned out of their course by Cyrus, should be a resort for such beasts as frequent only dry and barren soils.

*session for the bittern, and pools of water.** Another part is described as ~~dry~~ and naked, and barren of every thing, so that hereby was fulfilled another prophecy, which seemed in some measure to contradict the former: *her cities are a desolation, a dry land, and a wilderness, a land wherein no man dwelleth, neither doth any son of man pass thereby.†* The place thereabout is represented as overrun with serpents, scorpions, and all sorts of venomous and unclean creatures, so that *their houses are full of doleful creatures, and dragons cry in their pleasant palaces; and Babylon is become heaps, a dwellingplace for dragons, an astonishment and hissing, without an inhabitant. Neither can the Arabian pitch his tent there, neither can the shepherds make their folds there.‡* The Lord of hosts hath swept it with the besom of destruction.

* Isaiah 14th, 23d.

† Id. 51st, 43d.

‡ No circumstance could more strongly express the barrenness, and absolute desolation of the place. For, the Arabs, being wandering shepherds, lead their flocks through the desert wherever there is the smallest appearance even of that coarse and husky vegetation which here and there shoots up among its parched sands, from which their goats, asses, and camels, are frequently obliged to gather their meagre and scanty subsistence. If the Arabian shepherd cannot pitch his tent there, it is because the absolute barrenness and desolation of the region furnishes nothing for the sustenance of life even to these hardy animals,

How wonderful are such predictions compared with the events, and what a convincing argument of the truth, and divinity of the holy scriptures! Well might God challenge all the false gods to perform the like. *Who hath declared this from ancient time? Have not I the Lord? And there is no God else besides me, declaring the end from the beginning; and from ancient times, the things that are not yet done.** And, indeed, where can you find a similar instance, but in scripture, from the beginning of the world to this day?†”

although they can subsist on a much scantier and coarser vegetation than other creatures.

* Isaiah. 45th, 21st; 46th, 10th.

† Newton on the Prophecies, vol. 1. p. 309, 311. edit. London 1759.

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LECTURE XV.

Prophecies concerning the Messiah.

NO evidence for the truth of the christian revelation, derived from the predictions of the holy scriptures, appears to me more clear and strong than that which results from that stream of prophecy concerning a future Messiah; which, commencing with the earliest periods of time, terminates, at length, in Jesus Christ. We trace it from Adam, in that mystical promise, *the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head*, down through the line of patriarchs and prophets to the time of Christ himself, in whom all the prophecies, and types of the ancient dispensations have been completed, and the expectations of the whole world fulfilled. For, it is a circumstance particularly deserving your attention, that there was no civilized nation of antiquity, in which were not found traditions concerning a divine personage who should appear upon earth to teach men the true knowledge of God, their duties, and their hopes, and

to restore the reign of righteousness and peace to the world afflicted with miseries and crimes. This was a natural consequence of the piety and prophetic character of the father of the race after the deluge. Instructing his children, who were destined to be the founders of the future nations of the world, in the principles of piety and virtue, he would be especially solicitous to instil into their minds this sublime and blessed hope, which was given by God as the consolation of man in the depth of his affliction after the *fall*. If the mosaic history of the world be true, if Adam after his fall, received this consolatory promise; and if Noah were a good man, and a prophet;*

* From the pious and prophetic character ascribed to Noah in the sacred writings, we ought to expect among his near descendants, the founders of the various nations of the world, many good men, well instructed in the principles of religion as far as they were known to him, and in those traditionary predictions which had been imparted either to himself, or to antecedent patriarchs and prophets. These, of course, would be transmitted to their posterity, and, for several generations, perhaps, in a considerable degree of purity. But, at length, becoming corrupted, and blended with many fables, and having descended so far from their source that their true origin was in a great measure forgotten, or in danger of being so, it is reasonable to believe that some good men, in different nations, in order to prevent them from utterly falling into oblivion; or some cunning and ambitious men, that they might themselves pass for prophets, or be acknowledged as lawgivers divinely instructed, would commit them to writing, mixing with them other matter connected with civil policy,

then ought we to expect to find this original prediction and promise, with more or less clearness, among the traditions of all the primitive nations of mankind; and, finding it among all nations, as we do, it may justly be considered as an absolute verification of the account of Moses, and of the existence of this prophecy from the beginning; for we can hardly conceive of any other mode in which it could have been so universally diffused. It received further elucidation and extension, in the progress of time, by succeeding patriarchs and prophets. The knowledge of it became more definite by the dispersion of the Jewish nation, who carried their sacred writings with them in all their wanderings. At length the precise period, at which the Messiah should appear,

or religion, and giving them a form according to the genius and views of the authors. Hence, perhaps, the origin of the sibylline verses, or oracles at Rome, and of other similar works to which a sacred veneration was paid in various countries of antiquity. And hence the resemblance of these traditions in many respects to one another, and to the sacred scriptures. It is not improbable that these traditions might have afterwards received greater clearness and precision from the sacred writings, which were dispersed, along with the people of Israel and Judea, after their respective captivities, through all the nations of the East. To the holy records the name of Daniel would naturally give great authority, who, during many years, directed all the principal operations of the vast empires of Babylon, and Persia, which extended over the greater part of the Asiatic continent.

became fixed and settled in prophecy. And, at the moment that his birth was announced, the world was waiting for the event with anxious and universal expectation. The harmonious muse of Virgil has presented to us the character of the expected prince and saviour, drawn from tradition, and has exhibited the general hope and solicitude of the nations for his appearance at that time,* in an exquisite poem, and almost in prophetic numbers.† “The last age, says he, is at length arrived predicted by the prophetess of Cumæ. The mighty order of ages begins to circle anew. Justice returns to the earth, and the happy reign of Saturn; and from heaven descends a new, and divine offspring. Soon shall the great months begin to revolve; and every vestige of our former crimes shall be effaced: thus shall the earth

* The time at which this great poet wrote was but a few years before the birth of Christ.

† *Ultima Cumæi venit jam carminis ætas;
Magnus ab integro seclorum nascitur ordo.
Jam redit et Virgo; redeunt Saturnia regna;
Jam nova progenies cælo dimittitur alto.*
——— *Incipient magni procedere menses,
Te duce, siqua manent sceleris vestigia nostri,
Irrita perpetua solvent formidine terras.
Ille deum vitam accipiet,———
Pacatumque reget patriis virtutibus orbem.
Aggredere O magnos, aderit jam tempus honores,
Cara Deum soboles! magnum Jovis incrementum!*

be redeemed from the distressing causes of perpetual fear. He shall partake of the life of gods. And he shall rule the peaceful world with his father's virtues. The time is now at hand. Enter on thy mighty honours, dear offspring of the gods! O son of supreme Jove!" What a resemblance do we perceive in these strains of the Roman poet, to those of a Hebrew prophet! In the same spirit proceeds the whole of this admirable poem, which might be esteemed an almost literal translation of many of the most beautiful passages in the prophecy of Isaiah. And it is, indeed, far from being improbable that Virgil was acquainted with the prophetic scriptures, as they had, long before this period, been translated into the polite and universal language of the Greeks. Thus much, at least, appears to be certain, that an acquaintance with the writings of the Jews seems to have excited, or renewed the attention of mankind to this great event, as being near at hand, a vague expectation of which had been long nourished by the ancient traditions of their respective countries. Suetonius and Tacitus, whose historical accuracy and judgment have placed them in the very first rank of historians, both inform us "that there prevailed over the whole East, an ancient and fixed opinion, that there should, at that time, arise a person out

of Judea who should obtain the dominion of the world.”* They say, indeed, that popular flattery, or credulity applied these traditionary oracles to the Roman emperor Vespasian who had been raised to the empire by the eastern legions, about the time that he engaged in the Jewish wars. But common sense must convince every thinking man, that expectations so universal, founded on predictions which had been transmitted down through ages, always pointing to the same period, and to a divine personage of the most sublime character, who should appear upon earth for the destruction of vice, and the establishment of righteousness, must have had a different origin from an accidental rumor generated, one knows not how, and passing away with the events of the day; and a very different object from Vespasian, who had nothing to distinguish him from so many other soldiers of fortune who had been raised from the ranks to the imperial purple.

* Neither the pagans, nor the great body even of the Jewish nation could easily form just conceptions of the nature of that spiritual kingdom which the Son of God was coming to establish among men; they therefore interpreted the figurative language in which it was described in their traditions, and prophecies, and by their respective poets, of such temporal power, glory, and empire as were adapted to the grossness of their imaginations. The imagery, however, which they employed, ought to have led their minds to purer and sublimer views.

Recent researches into the history and antiquities of most of the eastern nations, and particularly of Persia, India, and China, have proved that similar traditions, to those which Virgil has shown us to have prevailed in the Roman empire, have existed among them from immemorial time.*

In these facts we have an extraordinary moral phenomenon presented to our reflections, which car-

* See Asiatic Researches. Maurice's Indian Antiquities. Father Du Halde's History of China.

Father Du Halde, who, by a residence of many years at Pekin, before the Jesuits were expelled from that empire, was well acquainted with the annals of China, learned from them that there had been anciently a general, and strong expectation among them of some divine messenger to descend upon earth, to instruct mankind, and to lead them to the knowledge of the true religion. And, whether it was because they had a peculiar veneration for the West, their ancestors having come from that quarter after the deluge, or for any other reason, they denominated this heavenly teacher, *the beautiful, or glorious man of the West*. Having waited beyond the time which their traditions had fixed for his appearance, the emperor Han-ming-ti, about sixty four years after the birth of Christ, sent a splendid embassy to inquire among all the western nations if he had yet appeared among any of them. His ambassadors proceeded on their route as far as India, and, finding there the worship of the idol Fo recently established, they returned to the emperor with this idol, and with priests to instruct the people in the rites and ceremonies used in his temples, supposing that they had accomplished the object of their mission. Since that time about one third part of the Chinese nation has addicted itself to the worship of this idol.

ries in itself no small degree of evidence, that the traditions relative to a future divine teacher, and legislator to come into the world were founded in original prophecy; and that all the prophecies of the holy scriptures relating to this object were actual inspirations from heaven, and had their full completion in our Lord Jesus Christ. For before the birth of Christ all nations had their traditions, and their predictions concerning such a divine messenger as the scriptures have described, and held out to the hopes of mankind, through all the line of their patriarchs and prophets, from the beginning of the world. These prophecies, and these traditions all pointed nearly to the same country, and to the same period. Accordingly at that period, and in that country, when expectation, nursed by the belief of ages, was all alive, arose a man claiming his birth from heaven, who united in himself all the characters ascribed in ancient prophecy to the future Messiah. He has taught mankind the purest, and sublimest notions of God; he has established among his disciples the most holy and rational worship of the Supreme Being, instead of those groveling and corrupted superstitions which had before enslaved the greater portion of the world; he has proclaimed to the universe the most perfect law of morals; he

has brought life and immortality to light, confirming it by his own resurrection, after having submitted to death, as he declared, for the sins of the world; and, certainly, his doctrines have produced the greatest and happiest revolution which has ever taken place in the moral ideas, and the manners of mankind. And, since his appearance, we see that those expectations, which before were so ardent and so universal, have every where ceased; for, to believers, they have been completely realized, and, to all others, if Jesus Christ is not the divine messenger and prince who was to come, there is no longer any foundation on which they could be supported. Here then is a mighty stream of prophècy commencing with the history of the world itself, and continued down through successive ages to the era of Christ, which carries in its commencement, its extent, its progress, and its termination, shall I not say, infallible signatures of divine truth. Here we behold an emanation of prophetic light darting its distant rays upon this glorious object from the beginning of time. At first, indeed, it appears faint and feeble like the dawn when it begins to break upon the darkness of the night; but, as the sun of righteousness approaches to his rising, we see it continually becoming more luminous and distinct. At length, we behold this spi

ritual sun appearing in all his glory in the heavens, and divine truth beaming in its full lustre on the nations.

The holy prophets have not only announced a future Messiah to the world, who should derive his birth immediately from heaven, but, in the progress of that illumination which gradually arose with increasing brightness upon the ancient church, they were enabled at last to delineate his character, as well as to foretel the time of his appearance upon the earth, with such exactness, and with such distinguishing traits, as necessarily to add great, not to say invincible authority to their predictions. I shall very briefly consider these predictions, in the first place, as they regard his character, and afterwards, as they indicate the time of his revelation to the world. It is not my design to trace out the progressive stages of prophetic light, under the ancient dispensations of grace, in the figurative promise given to Adam; in the symbolic and practical revelation made to Abraham in the command to sacrifice his son on Mount Moriah; or in the analogy by which Moses instructed the church of Israel: *A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up to you, like unto me; him shall ye hear.* These, and a thousand other gradual developments of his character, and offices, I

shall pass over, to come at once to that ultimate degree of illumination which God was pleased to afford the ancient church, when the mosaic dispensation was approaching towards a close. Then we find, especially in the prophet Isaiah, such striking delineations of the mediatorial character of Christ, so extraordinary, and yet so accurate and just, as must affect with mingled wonder and devotion, every reflecting, and candid inquirer after truth. In the Messiah, as he appears exhibited by the Spirit which animated the prophets, are united such opposite extremes of grandeur and humility, of omnipotence and weakness, of celestial perfection and human infirmity, as men, writing from the impulse merely of their own minds, whether we suppose them inflamed with enthusiasm, or acting under the direction of the cold and calculating genius of imposture, would never have brought together. A heavenly messenger sent on the most important errand to mortals, a prince claiming his descent from heaven, who was to extend the empire of peace, and righteousness over the universe, to compose its disorders, and put an end to its crimes, if the picture were drawn merely from the imagination of the writer, would be invested only with those noble and divine attributes which would become his relation to God. It never

would have entered into a reasonable mind, judging on the common principles of human nature, to combine with these celestial properties and powers, poverty and weakness, insult and disgrace, humiliation and suffering. But God, who was preparing, at once; an instructor and a sacrifice, a king and a victim, for a fallen, and redeemed race, and who, for this end, united in the same person the most distant extremes of heavenly glory and of human infirmity, so overruled the minds of the prophets that they have drawn a character which they themselves could not comprehend, or explain; which, left to themselves, they never would have conceived, and which could be understood only by the coming of the great Archetype himself.

Let us contemplate the various, and apparently contradictory lights in which he is represented to us by the spirit of prophecy. *Unto us, saith the prophet Isaiah, a child is born; unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulders; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. And of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.** And in other parts of that sublime and wonderful book, he is exhibited in such circum-

* Isaiah 9th. 6th, 7th.

stances of humiliation and affliction that it would be difficult, without the guidance of that divine Spirit who inspired the prophet, to conceive how they should be applied to the same person. *He is despised,* says he, *and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Surely, he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; and the Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter; and, as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. "He was taken off by an oppressive judgment:"** and who shall declare his generation? *It pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief. When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days; and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands.*† The actual coming of the Saviour alone has been able to reconcile all these apparent prophetic contradictions, and to vindicate the inspiration of the holy prophets. In his birth announced by angels, and his death among malefactors; in the miraculous and

* Bishop Lowth's translation. v. 8.

† Isaiah 53d. 3d—10th.

omnipotent powers by which he attested his heavenly mission, and the weakness which subjected him to the power of sinful men; in his yielding to death in its most ignominious form, and his resurrection and triumph over it; in his descent from heaven to invest himself with the infirmities of human nature, and, again, in his ascension to his primitive glory which he had with his Father before the world was, we see extremes which God only could unite; we behold a character which the Spirit of God alone could have suggested to the minds of the prophets; we discern the justification of the prophets, and their truth triumphantly confirmed; and, in the confirmation of their truth, we see the infallible verification of our holy religion. For the Messiah, as he appears in the strains of the prophets, and Jesus Christ, as he appears in the gospel, are characters so entirely out of nature, so utterly beyond human conception and contrivance, that the correspondence of the prophecy to the history, and of the history to the prophecy, ought to be regarded as an irrefragable demonstration of the truth of both.

Having pointed out to you the early prophecy of a Messiah in the first promise made to man after his fall; the gradual and increasing light which was shed on this primary prediction, in the progressive dispensa-

tions of divine providence; the universal expectation which was entertained of the appearance of such a divine personage upon earth, founded probably on an original revelation made to the father of the race, and revived, and rendered more definite and clear by the dispersion of the Jewish nation, and the Jewish scriptures, into the various regions of the East; I shall further direct your attention in the close of the present, and in the following lecture only to two other predictions, one by the patriarch Jacob, and one by the prophet Daniel, which fix the time of the coming of the Messiah with such precision as hardly to leave any doubt of the divine inspiration under the direction of which they were uttered.

The patriarch Jacob, just before his death, taking, under the influence of the Spirit of God, a prospective view of the destinies of his respective children, and their posterity, delivers to Judah, his oldest son, this remarkable prediction, with regard to the permanence of his dominion, and the descent of the Messiah from him. *The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and to him shall the gathering of the people be.**

* Deut. 28th, 57th. The term *Shiloh*, according to the root from which it is derived, may signify either the *prepared*, the *sent*,

The most accurate and learned criticism applied to the terms in this passage translated *sceptre* and *lawgiver* leaves little room to doubt but that they imply the powers of civil government in the Jewish nation. And the interpretation universally given by the ancient Jewish church, and by the whole nation of Israel, to the name of *Shiloh*, (for they constantly interpreted it of the Messiah who was to come) is a proof that our application of it to the everblessed Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, is not, according to the assertions, or insinuations of many infidels, merely a recent, and convenient adaptation of a dubious term by christian writers to the purposes of their faith. No term has had a more precise, and less doubtful signification given to it by the uniform voice of all antiquity.

The import of this prediction, therefore, is, that the tribe of Judah should preserve a national existence, and continue to exercise the essential powers of civil government, till the advent of that great *deliverer* expected from the beginning of the world. This peculiar distinction of Judah, arising from the *or the giver of peace*, any or all of which, evidently referring to the character and office of the expected Messiah. Till his coming, the tribe of Judah should enjoy hereditary and sovereign power within itself; the phrase *from between his feet*, being a modest Hebraism, for a natural descendant of his family.

possession and exercise of the powers of government, seems indirectly to imply that this prerogative should be lost by the other tribes before the coming of the Messiah. And has not this prophecy, both in its direct, and its implied meaning, been completely fulfilled? All the tribes of Israel except that of Judah had lost their national existence, and even the distinction of their tribes, long before the birth of Christ; having been either blended with the tribe of Judah, or dispersed and lost among the various nations composing the Babylonian empire.* Judah retained both the sceptre of executive power, and the prerogative of interpreting, and administering their own law till the advent of the Saviour. Christ was

* Some colonies of people possessing the law of Moses, and professing to govern themselves by its moral and religious rites and institutions, as far as their present situation will permit, have been discovered in the interior of India, and on the borders of China, who are evidently descendants of the ten tribes who were carried away into captivity by the kings of Babylon, before the destruction of Jerusalem in the reign of Zedekiah, and the captivity of the tribe of Judah. They possess none of the prophetic writings after the age of David. And their copies of the pentateuch are plainly of the most remote antiquity; as appears from the kind of skins on which they are written, and from the circumstance of the letters, in many places, not being distinguishable, except by traces left in the skins, which have been made by the corrosion of the liquid with which they were originally traced.

born in the reign of Herod, the last prince who swayed the sceptre of Judah, and but a few years before the final extinction of the supreme judicial, legislative, and religious authority of the nation; and even of the nation itself as a distinct civil community. For, after Herod, the government of the Jews was for a short time divided among several petty princes, who possessed only the semblance of authority, under the supreme power of the Romans; and, on the destruction of Jerusalem, which followed in a few years, the miserable remnants of that people, whom a foreign sword, and the most frightful civil discord, had spared, were dispersed into all nations under heaven. And in this state of dispersion they remain, the visible monuments of the divine judgments, to this day.

Let me, then, express the spirit of this prophecy in the following reflections. The typical church and kingdom of the Messiah shall exist, till his advent, in the nation of Israel, and particularly in the tribe of Judah; in which tribe shall be vested and continued, for this purpose, all the powers of government both civil and religious. But when the Messiah shall have come, the reasons, for which this people is chosen by God, and separated as a church to himself from all the other nations of the earth, shall

cease; and then shall terminate their national, and typical existence. The spiritual empire of the Redeemer shall, after this period, embrace all nations without distinction, or preference; and *to him shall the gathering of the people* be*. With what wonderful exactness, then, have we seen this venerable patriarch and prophet, determine the era of this great event; trace out the destinies of his several sons, and restrict to Judah, the peculiar benediction of Abraham, which consisted in this promise: *in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed*.

About the period of the birth of Christ, the visible decline of the Jewish state, and its rapid tendency to dissolution, indicated, by manifest and unequivocal symptoms, to observing and reflecting minds, the approach of the great era fixed for the coming of the Messîah. Therefore Simeon, and many other pious Jews, were *waiting*, at this time, with anxious expectation, *for the hope of Israel*. But the body of that nation, now become worldly, and sensual in their minds, and ambitious in their views, mistook the true character of their deliverer, and the spiritual nature of his kingdom. They, therefore, did not recognise him when he stood in the midst of

* *The people*, in this place, as in numerous other passages of sacred writings, evidently refers to the *gentile nations*.

them; but, ungratified in their vain hopes, they put him to death in the rage of disappointment, and thereby accomplished another, and not the least glorious part of the prophecies concerning him. While flattering themselves with the illusion of a martial and victorious prince who should extend the empire of Jerusalem over the whole earth, their impatience of foreign domination daily increased, and precipitated them into disorders and revolts, which only hastened their destruction, and gave them the last fatal proof that the Messiah was already *come, and that they had done unto him whatsoever they listed.**

This prophecy places the advent of the Saviour at a period immediately preceding the dissolution of the Jewish government. The next lecture will present to you a prediction which fixes the time with still greater precision.

* Mat. 17th, 12th.

LECTURE XVI.

The Prophecies of Haggai, and of Daniel.

BEFORE I present to you the famous prophecy of Daniel which points to the very year of the Messiah's appearance, I cannot forbear to offer to your consideration, a prediction of the prophet Haggai which marks this great event by certain accompanying circumstances, so striking in their nature as to merit your particular attention, and so clear and obvious in their application as to require no illustration.

The temple of Solomon, which was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar was the most magnificent structure of the kind in the universe. It was, by the permission, and with the assistance of the kings of Persia, rebuilt by the Jews after their return from their captivity in Babylon. And although this second temple was a noble edifice, worthy of being consecrated to the worship of Jehovah, yet was it so far inferior to the grandeur and beauty of the former, that the

old men, who had seen them both, wept at the comparison. The prophet, to console them, promised that during the existence of that structure, however inferior it appeared in their eyes, the Messiah, who was so ardently *desired*, not only by them, but by *all nations*, should come into it, and fill it with a glory which should far surpass that of the temple of Solomon. The kings of David's, or the priests of Aaron's line, could not be compared to him who is Prince of Peace, the Son of the living God, and who is *a priest forever after the order of Melchisedeck*, ordained to *bring in everlasting righteousness*. That temple, therefore, should exceed the former in glory, on account of the superior glory of him who should come to reside in it as king in his holy hill of Zion, and as the universal priest of nature, who should, in that place, offer up to God the prayers and worship of all nations through his own blood; and no less, perhaps, should it exceed in glory on account of that peaceful dominion which he should there establish over all the earth, and of the excellence and perfection of that law of peace and charity which he should thence announce to all mankind. *I will shake all nations*, saith he, *and the desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory*, saith the Lord of hosts; *the glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the*

*former, saith the Lord of hosts. And, in this place, will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.** In this prophecy, we see it declared that the Messiah, who was emphatically *the desire of all nations*, should come during the existence of that temple. And the Lord Jesus Christ did accordingly appear a few years before it was utterly destroyed by the armies of Rome, under the command of Titus Vespasian. His coming, it is said, should be immediately preceded by a terrible convulsion of all nations: evidently referring to those dreadful civil wars which agitated the Roman world before the establishment of the empire, and which were the most fierce, the most bloody, and widely extended of any recorded in ancient history. And, accordingly, it was just at the termination of these furious and long continued conflicts, and almost at the moment that Augustus Cesar had, for the third time since the foundation of the city, shut the temple of Janus, at Rome, in token of the prevalence of universal peace, that the Saviour of the world was born. The Son of God, standing on Mount Zion was thence to proclaim the gospel of peace to the universe. This was to be the principal glory of the second temple, at the sight of which, the

* Haggai 2d. 7th, 9th.

aged Jews, through their ignorance of the future, were now uttering their sighs and regrets. And, as an expressive symbol of the peace of the gospel, it pleased God, at that moment, to restore peace to the afflicted nations, and to choose that state of the world to bring his wellbeloved Son upon the earth.* You see this prophecy, then, brief as it is, marked by most important, and characteristic circumstances; and the event, in the most striking and surprising manner, corresponding with them in every point.

But my principal design in this lecture is to show the precision and exactness with which the spirit of prophecy has pointed out the time when this heavenly messenger, this *giver of peace* should appear on the earth, and fulfil the expectations of so many ages. Nearly five hundred years before his birth, Daniel, whose preeminent wisdom and piety raised him to the supreme direction of affairs under two successive kings of Babylon, and of Persia, pronounced this extraordinary prediction. *Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people, and upon thy holy city, to finish transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the*

* May there not be a designed allusion to this circumstance in the language of the prophecy?

vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy. Know, therefore, and understand, that, from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto Messiah the prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself. And the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many, for one week; and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease; and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.

To understand this prophecy it is necessary to recollect a division of time which was peculiar to the Jews, and which is often employed in prophetic language. This division was by *sabbatical* periods. Seven days constituted an ordinary week,* or sabbatical

* This division of time, perhaps, ought not to be considered as peculiar to the Jews, inasmuch as the Egyptians, and some other nations are thought to have computed time by periods of seven days, according to the number which they assigned to the

period of days, and as many years constituted a sabbatical week of years, or jubilee. Hence a week stands in this prophecy for seven years; and the whole period of seventy weeks, amounts to four hundred and ninety years. This is the period, then, marked out by the Spirit of God to elapse between the date of the decree issued by the king of Persia for the re-establishment of the city and temple of Jerusalem, and the death of the Messiah.

Some small differences with regard to historical dates and facts have taken place among the various interpreters of this famous prediction, but not such as to involve any question of its authenticity, or any doubt of the precision and exactness with which the principal fact, *the death of the Saviour* is foretold. All, by different modes of computation, arrive at the same point as nearly as, perhaps, is possible in tracing events of such remote antiquity. Several edicts concerning the affairs of the Jews, were promulgated by the kings of Persia, shortly after the subversion of the Babylonian empire. But I follow the authority of the very judicious and learned Prideaux who considers the decree which marks the commencement of this prophetic period to be that which was planets. But we know of no nation except the Jews who used the sabbatical week of years, or jubilee:

issued by Artaxerxes Longimanus in the seventh year of his reign in favour of Ezra. Some beginnings had been made under the decree of Cyrus, about seventy seven years before, towards rebuilding Jerusalem. But the work had been obstructed by the envy and hostility of the Samaritans, and other neighbouring nations; impressions unfavourable to the Jews had been made on the minds of the immediate successors of Cyrus; and these concurring with various other causes, had impeded the progress of the city; so that, in the beginning of the reign of Artaxerxes, it was still, in a great measure, in the same state of desolation in which it had remained under the power of the Babylonians. But, in the seventh year of that king, Ezra, a prince of the Jewish nation, and a scribe, and doctor of their law, of the greatest distinction and merit, received from him more ample powers to rebuild the city, and temple, and to reorganize the whole Jewish polity. In these great works he laboured with success and zeal, aided by vast numbers of his countrymen who returned with him from the land of their captivity, to take possession again of the inheritance of their fathers. The amplitude of this commission, the illustrious character of Ezra, the zeal with which he commenced, and the success with which he prosecuted, the

restoration of his desolated country, all confirm the opinion of the celebrated historian, whom I have mentioned, that this is *the commandment to restore, and build Jerusalem*, from *the going forth* of which, this great prophetic period of *seventy weeks* commences. And beginning from this point, and examining with his usual accuracy and discrimination, the whole intervening series of events till the death of Christ, this great chronologer finds, by a chain of apparently the most fair, and conclusive deductions, the precise period of four hundred and ninety years.*

This period the prophet afterwards divides into three distinct portions of seven weeks, of sixty-two weeks, and of one week. The first of these evidently refers to the time consumed in rebuilding the city, and the temple, and completely reestablishing the Jewish polity, which, on account of the impediments continually thrown in the way of those good men

* The period, says Dr. Prideaux, corresponded with such precision to the prophecy, that Christ suffered in the same *month*, after the lapse of four hundred and ninety years, in which Ezra set out from Babylon in the execution of his commission. He began his march for this purpose in the month Nisan, in the 4256th year of the Julian period, and in the month Nisan of the 4746th year of the same period Christ suffered; making the interval exactly four hundred and ninety years.

Ezra and Nehemiah, the leaders of the work, chiefly by the malignity of the Samaritans, was protracted to forty-nine years, or the first seven prophetic weeks. In this period *the street was built again, and the wall even in troublous times. And troublous were the times;* for, exposed perpetually to the assaults of their enemies, they often pursued their work at the hazard of their lives. Often were they obliged to throw down the implements of their labour, and grasping their arms, to run from their walls to meet the attack of their inveterate foes, and, having repulsed them, they returned to their dangerous work again. The next period embraces sixty-two weeks, or four hundred and thirty-four years, during which time the church and nation of the Jews were to remain completely restored till the coming of the Messiah.* The last period, which is *one week*, now

* Perhaps our translation ought to be pointed a little differently in this place, by which the meaning would be more obvious; and instead of writing it *from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto Messiah the prince, shall be seven weeks, and sixty and two weeks; the street shall be built again, &c.* transfer the semicolon from the end of *sixty and two weeks*, and place it at the end of *seven weeks*, and then we shall read it thus, *from the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem, &c. shall be seven weeks; (viz. consumed in building) and sixty and two weeks the street shall be built again, having been built in troublous times. And after sixty and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, &c.*

remains for his ministry, and the introduction of the gospel dispensation, which, depending for its completion principally on the death of the Saviour, the period is, therefore, characterized by that great event: *after sixty and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off; but not for himself.* But, before his death *he shall confirm the gospel covenant with many for one week.* In the beginning of the period, this was fulfilled by his precursor, John the Baptist,* whose ministry continued three years and a half, or half the week; and then by himself, who filled up the remaining half of that prophetic, or sabbatical week, by his personal ministry. And, finally, it is predicted that at the end of that half of the week, *he shall*, by offering himself up a sacrifice, and oblation for the sins of the world, *cause all typical sacrifices and oblations to cease.* For, although they should continue, as they did, to ~~be~~ offered for a few years longer in the temple at Jeru-

* *The word of the Lord*, says St. Luke, *first came to John in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Cesar.* This, reckoning from the time that he was associated in the empire with equal powers with Augustus, which, according to archbishop Usher, was in the year of the Julian period 4739, was exactly seven years before the crucifixion, and three years and a half before the commencement of our Lord's ministry. And with John began the gospel dispensation, or covenant. For, saith Christ, *the law and the prophets were until John; since that the kingdom of God is preached.* Luke 16—16.

saalem, yet when that great oblation was made which they were designed to prefigure, they no longer had any meaning.*

Thus were seventy weeks determined in the purposes and decrees of God, upon that nation which had been a chosen people, and on that city which had been peculiarly separated as a holy place to the worship of God, when they should no longer be a chosen people, and a city consecrated to God; but Messiah, *the desire of all nations*, should come, as the Saviour of the world, to *finish transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy,*† when the Most Holy

* Such is the interpretation which Dr. Prideaux, who is, equally, an excellent critic, and a great historian, gives to the language in which the occurrences of the last week are expressed. In our translation it is said, *in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease. In the midst*, is not the meaning of the original. It should be rendered *in the half of the week*; and then the sense will be, according to that great writer whom I have already so often named, in that half occupied by his own immediate ministry, he shall put an end to the symbolical dispensation of the Jews; he shall cause all typical sacrifices to cease, by the sacrifice of himself, the last act of that sublime ministry.

† To *finish*, or, as it might be rendered, to *restrain*, transgression, by destroying its power over men, and subduing its principles in their hearts; to *make an end of sins*, that is, of their guilt

should be *anointed King* over all, for the redemption and government of the universe, and a *Priest* to God forever to stand between a guilty world, and the throne of eternal justice.

The latter part of this prophecy presents to our view the fearful destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, and of the whole Jewish nation, for the greatest crime which has ever been committed on the earth. *Messiah shall be cut off*, saith the prophet, and for this enormity, *the people of the prince* who shall come shall destroy the city*, which no longer contains a nation chosen and separated from the rest of the world to God, *and the sanctuary*, no longer holy, and peculiarly consecrated to his worship; *and*

and condemning power over penitent sinners, he having been *made sin*, and a curse for them; to make *reconciliation*, or, as the word ought rather to be translated, *expiation, for iniquity*; to *bring in everlasting righteousness*, in the purity, perfection, and perpetuity of the gospel law of righteousness, in opposition to the temporary obligation of the mosaic law, and the impotence of its types and *sacrifices which could never make the comers thereunto perfect*, (Heb. 10. 1.) and, finally, to *seal up the vision and prophecy*, that is, completely to accomplish all the prophecies of the ancient scriptures, and all the objects for which visions and inspirations were ever imparted to ancient patriarchs and holy men; and to put an end to shadows when the substance was come, and to all prophetic and obscure revelations when the sun of righteousness himself was risen on the world.

* The Romans under Titus Vespasian.

the end thereof shall be with a flood, and to the end of the war desolations are determined. And for, or by, the overspreading of abominations, that is, by the overspreading of that terrible army which carries in its standards the abomination of the Jewish nation,† he shall make it desolate until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.‡* These are strong expressions; manifestly intended to depict the total ruin of that devoted city. And the history of its destruction, as it is related by the great Jew-

* The fearfulness of their destruction, the diabolical rage of the Jews themselves in this war, and the exterminating fury of the Romans, have been already exhibited in a former lecture.

† It is well known that the Romans carried in their standards the objects of their worship, the images of their gods, their emperors, and their eagles, to which they sacrificed, and which were, therefore, held in the utmost abhorrence by the Jews.

‡ There is a small obscurity in these last expressions, probably arising from the Hebrew idiom, from which they receive their form. Perhaps I shall not deviate far from their true meaning in the following paraphrase and comment. Jerusalem shall be utterly laid waste by the idolatrous armies of Rome till the just indignation of heaven for her crimes be fully *consummated* upon her. And in this *desolation* shall she lie till the period of God's judgments, which he has *determined* in his holy and righteous purposes, shall be fulfilled. Then shall the repentant nation of Israel, embracing the faith of the blessed Redeemer, for the impious rejection of whom they had incurred these terrible judgments, be restored to their own land, and it shall be again recovered from its long desolations.

ish historian himself, and the wretched state in which Jerusalem, and the land of Judea are seen to remain at this day, sufficiently demonstrate that no terms could be too strong to convey an adequate idea of the absolute desolation in which, according to the divine denunciations, they were overwhelmed.

Such is the surprising exactness with which the spirit of prophecy has foretold these astonishing events at the distance of nearly five hundred years before their accomplishment. And although the commencement of this grand period of seventy prophetic, or sabbatical weeks is embarrassed with some chronological difficulties arising from the inaccuracy of ancient historians,* which, at this distance of time, cannot be very surprising, yet it is well known that the whole nation of the Jews, guided by the prophecies generally, and especially by this prediction of Daniel, had fixed the time of the advent of the Messiah with so much precision, that, at the birth of our blessed Saviour, the public expectation was raised to the highest pitch. About that period, if any extraordinary person appeared in Judea, it occasioned among the people an universal inquiry: *Is this he*

* These will be learned and obviated by consulting, besides Dr. Prideaux, Archbishop Usher, Dr. Lancaster, and Sir Isaac Newton on the prophecy of Daniel.

who was to come? The prophets, indeed, had portrayed the Messiah surrounded with the most glorious attributes of personal dignity, of power, and dominion, as well as exhibited him in the humble character of a suffering victim. The pride and ambition of the rulers of this nation, now become gross and carnal in their imaginations, turned their view wholly to the former, while they neglected and forgot the latter. Hence when the Saviour actually appeared among them, they refused to acknowledge him. His humility obscured his glory in their eyes. And they were thereby unconsciously led to fulfil another, and no less important part of the divine predictions concerning him; that *Messiah should be cut off*, that he might *finish transgression, and make an end of sins, and make reconciliation for iniquity*; or, as another prophet expresses it, that he might be *wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities*, and that *the chastisement of our peace might be laid upon him*. Thus misguided and guilty, and stained with the blood of the Messiah, whom they had so long and so proudly expected, they accomplished the last terrible denunciations of the divine judgments against themselves, and prepared the way for that desolation of their country, and that dispersion of their nation, in which they continue to

this day, a fearful monument of the righteous indignation of heaven due to so great a crime.

Let us now briefly review the wonderful scene over which we have recently travelled. From the beginning of time, according to the sacred records, an obscure tradition appears to have existed among mankind of some divine person who should come into the world to illuminate it with truth, to redeem it from the misrule of guilty passions, and to govern it in peace and righteousness. In the progress of ages, the expectation of this heavenly instructor and ruler, cherished and directed by holy men claiming to be sent by God to prepare the world for his reception, grew continually stronger, and more universal. A series of prophecies were constantly shedding new light upon this object, and giving augmented vigor to this hope. The character of the Messiah, the union of the glories of a heavenly, with the infirmities of a mortal nature, in him, the splendor of celestial attributes joined with the most mild and amiable human virtues, but under circumstances of the deepest humiliation and affliction, the place of his birth, the character of his life, the cruelty and ignominy of his death, were more and more distinctly announced. At length the time of his coming was fixed with such surprising precision, that the very

year was named in which he should accomplish all the wonderful predictions of so many ages. At the same time, to add to so many prophetic wonders, it was foretold that he should be rejected, and put to death by that nation to whom he was especially promised, and by whom he was so anxiously expected as their pride and glory. It was foretold that, in consequence of this crime, that nation, which had hitherto been cherished as the chosen people of God, should be cast out of his favour and protection, and that the gentiles, whom they despised, should be incorporated into the church in their room, while they themselves should be scattered as exiles over the whole earth. Improbabilities, almost contradictions, certainly most dangerous oracles to be proclaimed at Jerusalem, which imposture never would have ventured to make a part of her system. But appearing as they do in the prophetic writings, those writings cherished and venerated by the whole Jewish nation, they carry with them almost irresistible demonstration that the prophets who foretold them were inspired by God.

And now, in the conclusion, let me ask, have we not seen a most extraordinary person appear in Judea according to the predictions of the sacred scriptures? And has he not appeared at the precise time

which they had marked out, and when, in consequence, he was expected, not by the Jews only, but by almost all nations? Since his coming, have not expectations, which before were so constant and universal, entirely ceased? Has not the Jewish nation, according to the prophecy, rejected him who came to them as the Messiah? And have not the gentiles gathered themselves under his wings, while the guilty Jews have been exiled from their country and scattered through all nations under heaven? Have we not seen the greatest moral revolution effected by his doctrines which has ever taken place in the world? And are not all these astonishing events evidently connected parts of a vast plan which takes its beginning with time itself, which we have seen gradually unfolding in the sacred oracles for a long series of ages, and to the consummation of which, when they ceased to speak, they still continue to conduct us by the lights of prophecy?

What, then, is the conclusion to which candid and impartial reason must lead us from all these premises? Is it not, that the prophecies have been inspired by God? that the plan which they develop is the work of God? and that it has been conducted to its wonderful issue by his own immediate hand?

I have thus presented to you a very cursory and partial review of the evidence for our holy religion which may be derived from prophecy. It is an ample field; I have led you only to the entrance. Yet, I trust, I have opened to you enough to convince every serious and ingenuous mind that is solicitous to obtain full satisfaction on a subject so interesting to the happiness, the duty, and the hopes of man, of the importance of exploring it more extensively. The argument, however, as far as we have pursued it, appears to me satisfactory and conclusive.

LECTURE XVII.

Collateral or Presumptive Proofs of Christianity. Of their Sublimity.

HAVING presented to you a concise view of the direct evidences of the truth of our holy religion, I proceed to exhibit some collateral and presumptive considerations which will be found of importance in giving strength to the general argument. Of this species of evidence it is the character, that the various presumptions, or probabilities, taken separately, do not carry to the mind that complete conviction on which it can entirely rest independently of other proof; but the whole viewed together forms an accumulation of evidence which it is not easy to resist; and they greatly strengthen the impression of those proofs which are more immediate and positive.

These presumptions arise, in the first place, out of the scriptures themselves: their sublimity, their purity, their plainness, their efficacy on the hearts of men, and their consistency with the state of the

world, and with themselves, though penned by writers of such various characters, and so far removed from one another in point of time, through a long series of ages: in the next place, out of the character of the Saviour, and of those humble instruments which he employed to promulgate his doctrines; and lastly, out of the consequences which have flowed from the promulgation of the gospel.

One of the first of the internal characters of the scriptures which strikes us, is the grandeur both of sentiment and language which pervades the poetic and prophetic parts of them in general, and especially that astonishing sublimity into which they rise whenever they speak of the Deity, who is, indeed, their principal subject. They frequently present to us very noble views of the actions and sentiments of illustrious men, as well as magnificent descriptions of natural scenes: but whenever they speak of the perfection, or the operations of the Supreme Being, as if full of God, they seem rapt above themselves. They break out into strains to which there is no parallel, the enemies of christianity themselves being judges, in the productions of ancient or modern genius. This was to be expected of men writing, or speaking under the influence of genuine inspiration;

and the existence of the fact, that they have thus spoken and written, affords a presumption, of no inconsiderable force, that they were truly the subjects of that divine inspiration to which they laid claim. Whence, if not from this cause, was it that a few devout men in an obscure nation, and in a remote age, far beyond the birth of arts in Greece or Rome, formed such sublime, or rather, such divine conceptions of Deity, and have conveyed them in such elevated strains as there is nothing to equal in the noblest works of those celebrated nations even in the most refined periods of their improvement. Let me select only one example of the appearance of the Almighty. *Then the earth shook and trembled. He bowed the heavens also and came down, and darkness was under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub and did fly; yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind. The Lord thundered in the heavens; then were the beds of the ocean laid bare; and the foundations of the world were disclosed.** But where shall we find an idea so sublime, and expressed in such a noble simplicity of language, as that of the creation, as it is represented by Moses: *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth; and God said, let light be,*

* Psalm 18th.

*and the light was.** Perhaps words cannot better express the facility with which omnipotence gave existence to the universe.

Even the name by which the Supreme Being was pleased to reveal himself to Moses, exceeds in grandeur and sublimity whatever the religion or philosophy of paganism ever taught on the subject of God. It comprehends ideas more elevated, and worthy the divine nature than had ever before entered the conception of man. All the pagan nations, even those who had made the greatest advances in science, if they did not adopt an atheistical philosophy, had, too nearly, approximated the divine to the human nature. We find worthy ideas of the Creator only in the sacred scriptures. *Jehovah*, which is interpreted *I am*, expresses essential life, eternal existence, universal presence. It implies that all things existing in him, and by him, and depending absolutely on his will for the origin of their being, and their continued existence, are to be regarded as nothing in comparison with him, and that he is all in all. He is the only proper being; the universe is full of him alone; the rest

* Gen. 1. 1. This passage has been quoted as a noble example of sublimity and simplicity united, by that illustrious critic Longinus; and the quotation has been repeated after him by almost every critic since his age.

are passing shades. Where, then, among all the nations of the ancient world, except in this circumscribed corner of the earth, favoured with the peculiar illapses of the divine Spirit, to keep alive the *perpetual fire* of truth, till the rising of *the sun of righteousness*, do we find such exalted and sublime notions of God? When this is fairly considered, may we not justly say, *favoured with the peculiar illapses of the divine Spirit*, without assuming for granted a principle not yet proved? For whence, but from this source, could arise those transcendent discoveries which illuminated the mind of a Jewish prophet concerning the divine nature? that burst of inspiration, whenever Jehovah is their subject, which so far excels the pretended inspiration of all other poets? On any of the ordinary principles or causes which assist to develop, and bring to perfection the genius of nations, or to promote the progress of science among them, this, surely, was not to have been expected in the nation of Israel. In poetry nothing has ever equalled the strains of the Hebrew prophets.* From them Milton has assisted the noblest flights of his

* To be convinced of this, the reader of taste need only consult the translation of Isaiah by bishop Lowth, with his critical notes and explanations, and his dissertation on the Hebrew poetry.

muse. When they introduce the majesty of God, the pious mind is overwhelmed by the torrent and grandeur of their thoughts, and struggles to expand itself to conceptions which it can never embrace. This is the true effect of the religious sublime. In theology, Plato obtained the title of the sublime philosopher of Greece, only for approaching those ideas of Deity which every where pervade the holy scriptures. And his principles, he confessed he did not draw from the resources of his own mind, or create by the efforts of his own genius, but acquired by travelling and conversing with the priests and literary men in those countries in which the scriptures were best known, and in which were found the purest remains of that original revelation, which I have before proved to have been transmitted by the second father of the race, after the deluge, to those nations in the East that immediately sprang from him.

To those sublime conceptions of the Deity which distinguish the sacred writings we may add the views which they present to us of the government of divine providence pervading every part of nature, from the highest sphere in the heavens, to the atom which seems casually to float in the atmosphere; from an angel to an insect: and if we add the doctrines which they teach of the creation and dissolution of the uni-

verse, and of the final judgment and everlasting destinies of mankind; where, besides, in all the volumes of human wisdom do we find ideas so grand, and so worthy of God? We can hardly resist the conclusion, therefore, that they have been inspired by that divine and infinite Spirit whose nature, and whose truth they profess to reveal to men.

It has been made a question whether or not the style of the sacred scriptures be proportionably elevated with the sentiments; or whether, in the structure and composition of their language, they are supported throughout according to the principles and rules of true taste. Eminent writers have appeared on both sides of this question; some contending for the affirmative, and endeavouring to maintain their opinion by a minute comparison of the diction of the scriptures with that of the classic writers of Greece and Rome;* others asserting that there is no standard of taste which can be fairly applied to the writings of all ages, and of all countries.† Human nature, they say, undergoes very material changes, not only in external form and appearance, but in the faculties

* A remarkable example of this mode of conducting the argument we have in *Blackwell's Sacred Classics*.

† Of this opinion the celebrated Warburton is the principal defender in his *Divine Legation of Moses*.

of the mind, and the habits of thinking, from climate, from the state of society, from the form of government, from the physical character of the country, from the progress of arts, and from various other causes, which contribute, at the same time, to create a correspondent variety in the ideas of beauty and taste which prevail in different nations. Hence, in all ages, a lofty and enigmatical manner of writing has obtained in Asia, which, in Europe, is considered as swoln and bombastic; and, on the other hand, the correct precision of the Attic style, which is admired in Europe, is regarded in Asia as low and frigid. We are not, therefore, to look, say these critics, for any standard of excellence and perfection in writing, which is invariably to govern the decisions of mankind with regard to the merit of works of genius and taste.

Such contrariety of opinion between men of perhaps nearly equal claims to learning and critical judgment, is one proof, among many others, that the question is not of great importance. The object of divine revelation is to teach men *divine truth*, under the inspiration of the holy Spirit, leaving the expression of it to each writer, according to his own genius and taste, formed and modelled, as it will be in some degree, by the genius and taste of the age in which

he lives. If these should not always be exactly conformed to the reigning taste of the period in which we live, this will not form any reasonable objection to the style of the holy scriptures as not properly expressing the majesty and sublimity which ought to be expected in the word of God.

Every man of true taste feels and acknowledges the sublimity of Shakspeare's genius, although we perceive in his strains many harsh and unharmonious numbers, and some departures from the rigorous exactness of critical rules. These are in some instances to be ascribed to the character of the age in which he lived. But frequently the noble flights of his muse bear him above all rule, and give him a complete empire over the mind, and over the critic's art. So the sublimity of inspiration may sometimes disdain to be measured by the little niceties of artificial rules. But I make no apology for the prophets. Elevated and transported with the grandeur of their subject, whenever they speak of God, or his works, or rapt with the fervor of their own devout feelings beyond the ordinary limits of human nature, they always express themselves nobly, and often with a transcendent glow and majesty of diction.

But in treating of the sublimity of the holy scriptures, and applying to them the rules of a just criti-

cism, it is necessary to use the same fairness and candor in judging of them, as of all other works of genius. The design of the writer should be kept in view, as well as the nature of his subject, that we may not look for the high ornaments of style in simple chronicles, nor for the sublime of poetry or eloquence in didactic precepts. Every part even of holy writ is not to be judged by the same rule.

Besides, as inspiration was designed only, or principally, to discover *truth*, but does not seem in any other way to have controlled the faculties of the human mind, except by the ardor with which it seized them and the strong impressions which it made upon them, a variety of style is to be expected among the sacred writers, arising from diversity of natural talents, and acquired improvements, or from the manners and genius of the respective ages in which they lived.

In estimating the true character of the scripture style we ought to be able to have recourse to the original. Great allowances ought to be made for the imperfections of a literal translation in prose, such as ours is, of compositions, many of them written in the highest spirit of poetry. Take the finest passages of the most admired classics of Greece or Rome, and render them in a translation equally simple and literal; take, for example, the translation of Virgil by

Watson, and compare it with our English version of the scriptures, and you must be forcibly struck with the superior majesty of the prophets and psalmists of Israel, above that of the prince of Roman poets, when exhibited before you in the same dress. The scriptures of the Old Testament, then, read with these views, and under these precautions, will, I doubt not, fully support their claim to a divine original, not only by the sublimity of their sentiments, but by the nobleness of their diction.

The New Testament, indeed, is written with the utmost simplicity of the narrative and epistolary style; but it contains the sublimest system of theology and of morals ever offered to the faith, or the reason of mankind. Here we behold the threefold existence of the Deity without destroying the perfect simplicity of the divine essence. Here we behold the astonishing assumption of the human nature into an intimate union with the divine. Here all the types and ceremonies of the ancient dispensation are seen to terminate in the Messiah; all its altars are extinguished, and their innumerable victims are comprised, and forever end, in one divine oblation for the sins of the whole world. Here we are taught to look forward to the dissolution of the universe, and the resurrection of the dead; and all nations of men

from the beginning to the end of time are presented to our view assembled before the tribunal of God. Here are decided the eternal destinies of men and angels. And after the great catastrophe of nature, we are taught to expect new heavens and a new earth, with the introduction of a new and everlasting order of ages. Whether the truth of christianity be admitted to be demonstrated or not, surely infidelity itself must be constrained to confess, that these are the most grand and sublime ideas which have ever entered the human mind. And most worthy they appear to be of that infinite wisdom, and holiness, and benignity, and power, to which they are ascribed.

LECTURE XVIII.

Collateral or Presumptive Proofs of Christianity. Of its Morality, and its Efficacy as a Principle of Virtue and a Holy Life.

THE purity and excellence of the moral doctrines of the holy scriptures, and especially of those immediately taught by our Saviour himself, and the blessed apostles, afford a presumptive argument, of no inconsiderable weight, for their divine authority. The principles of morals, and the rules of virtue, have always been subjects of the most diligent and curious inquiry among the sages of the ancient world, ever since civil society was first established under the influence of regular laws, or philosophy began to be cultivated. But no where else do we find such a pure, and excellent, and perfect system of morals as in the sacred writings. And this has been acknowledged by many of the most ingenious and candid enemies of the christian religion, while they ascribe it, however, to a cause which we can by no means admit; the natural progress of science, and

the gradual advances which have been made in the improvement of the human mind, by adding the experience of following ages, to the wisdom of the past. No such superior improvements in moral science were found, at the commencement of the christian era, in the doctrines of the schools;* and it is inconceivable that they should have first taken their origin among the fishermen and mechanics of Judea. The argument would have had more plausibility applied to the learned men of modern ages, if we had not the most certain evidence that the superiority of their moral and theological doctrines to those of the ancient schools, ought to be ascribed solely to the illumination shed by the scriptures on the christian world.†

True it is, that any pretence to revelation must come recommended by some general system of good morals, otherwise it will soon fall to the ground. But when an impostor has set up a fictitious claim to inspiration, we may ever expect to find some traits of human weakness and depravity mingled with his re-

* Of this every classic reader may easily be convinced by consulting Cicero *de natura deorum*.

† Whatever is excellent in the theological and moral principles of the koran of Mahomet we have likewise reason to believe was drawn from the knowledge which that impostor had both of the writings of the Old and the New Testament.

ligious doctrines. It is almost impossible that an impious, or immoral man should not transfuse, in some degree, the colour of his own character into his work. Hence, amidst the general precepts of justice, temperance, and chastity, without which civil society cannot exist, and which enter into all the religions of the world, still we find, in the temples of paganism, free permission given to the indulgence of the most licentious passions of the heart. It is in the koran itself, in the vicious licence which it grants its disciples, and the sensual paradise which it confers on its military saints, that we might learn the lust, and violence of its author, if we were not acquainted with the history of his life. But, in the holy scriptures, you not only discern a general system of good morals, many excellent precepts of piety and virtue, but you have presented to you a perfect body of doctrine in which the most faithful and candid scrutiny can find nothing of an opposite character or tendency. In them you perceive the principles and examples of the purest devotion, equally removed from the injudicious fervors of enthusiasm, and the cold and burdensome ceremonial of superstition: in them you see personal purity carried to the highest degree of perfection; and those virtues which most effectually promote the harmony, and the happiness

of society placed on their only true and stable foundation; charity which loves our neighbour as ourselves; meekness which is not prompt to revenge an injury; forgiveness which is ready to forget it; the whole animated by the love of God, and guarded against the disorders of the injurious passions by the holy influence of his fear.

On this subject the following considerations particularly merit your attention: the spirit of the morality of the gospel: its extent: the principles which it lays down as the summary, and the only true and efficient spring of all our duties: and finally, the discriminating test which it proposes of the sincerity of our obedience.

It has been justly remarked by Dr. Paley, after the celebrated Soame Jennyns, that the spirit of the morality taught by our blessed Saviour is entirely opposed to those splendid and ostentatious qualities which too generally pass in the world for virtues of a superior order, and which history so often ambitiously displays to decorate her style, and to captivate the unthinking admiration of mankind for her principal heroes. The gospel gives no praise to that pride which exalts itself over our fellow men, and is easily provoked at injuries real or imaginary; it has no indulgence for that jealous honour which is ever

ready to suspect, and revenge insults, or that lofty ambition of power and command, which the mistake of the world is apt to extol as a proof of elevation and nobleness of mind. On the other hand, next to the love and fear of God, it bestows all its approbation on meekness of spirit, on candor, on humility, on charity and kindness of heart, in a word, on those mild, innocent, unassuming, and benevolent dispositions, which give birth to the sweetest intercourse among mankind, and form the strongest and happiest cement of society. This is a morality entirely different in its genius from that which would be dictated by the spirit of the world. It is peculiar to the gospel. And although, at the first view, it may seem, to those who have received their education in the world, to be tame and pusillanimous, it will be found, on a fair and just examination, to discover a more profound estimate of moral worth than was ever before made; either in the school of philosophy, or in that of the world.

It is judiciously observed by both the distinguished writers to whom I have referred, that the heroic virtues, as they are called, are calculated only to disturb the peace and happiness of human society, and have, indeed, been the chief sources of the disorders, the wars, and revolutions which, in every period of

time, have afflicted all nations. On the contrary, if all men were governed by the christian virtues of humility, of meekness, of candor, of forgiveness, of charity, the earth, which has, hitherto, been the theatre of violent, conflicting, and cruel passions, would become the residence of tranquillity and peace.

Do you ask if the general prevalence of these meek and pacific principles in a nation would not expose it to insults and injustice from its powerful neighbours, and render it, at length, an easy prey to their ambition? I answer that the maxims of the gospel do not oppose the natural duties which every citizen owes to his country for its defence. It is among the primary obligations which the gospel imposes on its disciples, *to honour and obey the magistrate*, as well as *to fear God*. And the supreme magistracy of a state owes duties to the nation under its protection very different from those which subsist between man and man in society. It is the latter, chiefly, which the evangelic rules of meekness, humility, charity, and forgiveness are intended to regulate. And they promote peace and union by cultivating the spirit of mutual love; they prevent discords, by extinguishing, or correcting the passions which are the principles of contention and division. The civil laws of most countries aim at the same

end; but feebly, because they impose their restraints only on the outward action; whereas the gospel enters into the heart to correct the evil in its source. It is folly therefore to accuse of tameness and pusillanimity that spirit which, by changing the dispositions of the heart, promotes the peace of society in the most perfect manner; an object which it is the supreme end of a wise legislation even imperfectly to attain, by operating with its compulsory power on the external conduct. It is the error of the world to bestow its admiration on that bold and ardent character of mind which is quick in its sensibilities to injury, violent in its resentments, jealous of its honour, proud of its darlings, and ever ready, in order to avenge itself of real or imaginary wrongs, to break through both the prescriptions of law, and the dictates of justice. Such is commonly the heroic character whose achievements blazon the pages of history. Far different are the virtues of the gospel. Silent, yielding, and benevolent, they contribute to promote and secure the happiness of mankind, which the former tend to destroy.

When we consider, then, the perfect and unmixed purity of the morality of the gospel, and the indications which it exhibits of a most holy and spotless mind in its author; when we consider with what ad-

mirable wisdom he rejects the false and imposing virtues which have chiefly commanded the applause of the world, and even the approbation of the sage, and placed virtue, which is the mean of promoting human happiness, upon its true and only solid basis; when we reflect, further, how peculiar these excellencies are to the gospel of Christ, and how far they are above the wisdom, how contrary to the spirit of the world, we might well be surprised if any of the sages of Greece, rising above the genius and improvements of their age, had been the authors of such a system; but when we take into view the country, the education, and rank in life, of Christ, and his apostles, we must be astonished at the wisdom with which they have spoken. Considering them as mere men, bred up amidst the tools of the mechanic, or the nets of the fishermen, it must be utterly incredible. *Surely, exclaims Dr. Paley, Jesus must have been like no other carpenter, the apostles like no other fishermen!* Read the discourses, the parables, the history of the transactions of our blessed Saviour; read the moral precepts with which the epistles of the apostles every where abound, and I confess they appear to me to bear the evident and deep inscriptions of divine wisdom. The mission of the Saviour, and the doctrines of the gospel were

confirmed by great and numerous miracles; but, in my esteem, the greatest of all miracles would be the gospel itself, if we could suppose such a transcendent system of theology and morals, so sublime, so pure, so superior to the wisdom of the age, to have been the uninspired work of the unlettered fishermen of Judea.

The excellence of the christian morality may be estimated, in the next place, from its extent. The gospel does not limit its views to regulating the external conduct and intercourse of mankind with one another, to which civil laws are obliged to bound their influence. It goes to rectify the thoughts and desires of the heart, and thereby to purify the fountains of conduct: it places its restraints upon the first movements and springs of action. This is a point of the utmost importance in considering the true value of the morality of the gospel, which sets it far above the influence of civil laws, or the discipline of the schools. For, however regular the exterior deportment may be, if the imagination, and the affections remain impure, the soul must be unfit to appear in the immediate presence of God most holy, or to be joined to the society of perfect spirits in heaven; and there is no security for the rectitude of the conduct, whenever temptation invites, and opportunity fa-

vours indulgence. Fancy, if it is permitted without restraint to amuse itself with the plans, or to enjoy the pleasures of avarice, revenge, or lust; if it is allowed to present images of impurity to the mind, and range at will through ideal scenes of voluptuous enjoyment, taints the purity, while it inflames the passions, of the heart, and corrupts it no less effectually in its principles of action, than could be done by grosser gratifications.* The great Teacher, who shows in all his precepts how perfectly he understands human nature, as well as the eternal principles of right and wrong, lays the check of every sinful propensity, and every vicious action on the only spring on which it can be laid with effect: on the thoughts, on the fancy, on the heart. *Out of the heart, saith he, proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, &c. and these are the things which defile a man.*† And he who sees the end and consummation of the act in the principle from which it springs, and regards as already done whatever is completed in the desire, purpose, and determination of the soul,

* This is a remark founded on the strictest principles of reason, as well as of the gospel, which strongly condemns the readers, as well as writers of licentious poetry; and universally, all those who encourage, by their presence, any licentious exhibitions, or by purchasing any licentious productions of the arts.

* Mat. 15th, 19th.

condemns every one who even *looks on the sex with a lustful eye*.* What impostor, conscious of his own imperfections, would be willing to create so high and severe a standard of morals by which he must be judged himself? What crafty founder of a sect would not be more complaisant to the tastes, or the frailties of those whom he wished to allure to the party of his followers.†

The summary of duty, in the next place laid down in the holy scriptures, as comprehending the whole spirit and substance of the morality of the gospel, serves to demonstrate its excellence and perfection.

All our duties may be divided into two great classes: those which we owe immediately to God: those which terminate directly on our fellow men. And of both these classes our blessed Saviour has, after Moses, who received it from God himself to be prefixed to the tables of the ten commandments,

* Mat. 5th, 28th.

† I am aware that retreat from the world, abstemiousness and rigid penances often have an air of sanctity in the eyes of a superstitious people; and these mortifications have been introduced, as among the pharisees, the roman catholics, and the mahometans, to gain a certain degree of *popular* respect for their respective systems. But in such impostures you always find, at the same time, some facilities permitted to the wealthy and the powerful to evade the rigors of penance; or some indulgences granted in other articles to compensate these privations.

given the most admirable and perfect epitome: *thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; this is the first and great commandment; and the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.** By this concise view of the great and commanding principles of morals, we see that the gospel, which places the restraint of all vicious and sinful actions in a renewed heart, the only efficient point in which it can be fixed, places there also the true spring of all duty. And, is it not evident that the worship of God *in spirit and in truth*, veneration for his holy name, resignation to the dispositions of his providence, and universal obedience to whatever bears the stamp of his authority, will flow from supreme love to him as from its native fountain? And, on the other hand, is it not equally evident that justice, benevolence, candor, sincerity, meekness, forgiveness, and all those virtues which fulfil the multiplied relations which we bear to our fellow men, will be the natural and necessary consequence of sincere and undissembled love? But do you ask, if these principles are peculiar to the gospel? If we do not also find them inculcated by heathen moralists? We find reverence, and thankfulness to the gods frequently

* Mat. 22d—35th, 40th.

recommended by some of the philosophers; but in none of their writings do we see the supreme love of God stated as the fundamental principle of virtue and duty. In none, is the will of God stated as the sole, creating, preserving, and regulating power of the universe, to which, therefore, our most profound veneration and submission, our most constant and fervent gratitude are due. Indeed, they had extremely imperfect, or rather no just views at all either of creation, or of providence. And in the catalogue of virtues which connect us with mankind, although some of their schools require justice, truth, chastity, and recommend friendship, gratitude, and beneficence; yet we find not in any of them, the love of enemies, the forgiveness of injuries, nor any thing which may properly be called charity, as it is understood by christians, and inculcated in the gospel.

I am warranted, then, by the concurrent sentiments of the wisest, most candid, and pious christian writers, in pronouncing that never has a basis of duty, equally clear, comprehensive, and complete, been laid in the works of any of the sages of paganism, as that which has been laid in the gospel of Christ; and never has such a moral superstructure been reared on any basis; so admirable for its purity, for its simplicity, for its adaptation to every grade of

human understanding, for its fulness, and its application to every case which can arise to a fair and candid mind in the conduct of life. If, then, these principles, and this system which appear so perfect, would have been wonderful, proceeding from the genius and the pen of a Plato, or a Marcus Antoninus; if, indeed, we see nothing parallel in the schools of Greece or Rome; how much more wonderful are they if we consider them merely as the productions of unlettered peasants belonging to a country which Greek and Roman pride regarded as barbarian?

Having been nursed and educated amidst that light which the gospel diffuses wherever it is received, we are apt to regard its moral doctrines as containing only the simple and obvious dictates of natural reason; because they have entered into our earliest education, they have mingled with our first ideas, and been incorporated from infancy with all our habits of thinking. But to be justly impressed with the full force of the claim which it possesses to a divine original, we should return back to the periods which preceded the christian era, and to those countries which did not enjoy the light of revelation, and see what the wisdom of the wisest men has discovered upon the subject of duty and morals. This will afford an argument founded on fact and expe-

rience, the only ground on which we can rest a just and satisfactory conclusion on this subject. And when we see what the sages of the most enlightened nations have not done, and, on the other hand, what has been done by the simple fishermen of Judea, under the instructions of a master as little indebted as themselves to human science, will it not afford a strong, and almost irresistible presumption of the reality of that divine inspiration from which they professed that they derived this extraordinary wisdom? We know not how men in that age, in that country, and in their station of life could have attained to such superior knowledge on these sublime subjects, unless they had been divinely assisted. And, surely, if inspiration has ever spoken to the world, we cannot conceive of any thing more pure, more excellent, more perfect, which could have been dictated by heaven itself.

Another characteristic of the evangelic morality is the unmixed purity of the principle which it requires in order to constitute any action good, and acceptable to God. *Take heed*, says our blessed Saviour, *that ye do not your alms before men to be seen of them. When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret. When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand*

*know what thy right hand doth.** Of which precepts the evident import is, that we ought to offer our devotions to our heavenly Father, not as a mere form, not through ostentation, but purely for the love of God; and that we should fulfil every office of benevolence and charity to our fellow men simply from the love of doing good. No regard merely to our own credit and reputation among men, and no considerations of honour or interest arising from the publicity of our good deeds, ought to influence us in their performance: they ought ever to be the natural and spontaneous effusions of the pious and virtuous dispositions of the heart.

Many very amiable and benevolent persons have greatly mistaken the meaning of these precepts, as if they implied that the chief merit of charitable deeds consists in their being entirely withdrawn from the knowledge and observation of the world. So far is this from being true that, not unfrequently, their publicity may form part of their good desert, by the encouragement which it will afford to the alms of others. It is not the mode of doing a benevolent action that our Saviour designed to regulate, but the principles from which it should spring. In this view, what an amiable proof do these precepts contain of

* Mat. 6th, 3d.

the excellence of the evangelic doctrine, and the celestial purity of its spirit!

Another character of the sacred scriptures which has generally been relied on as affording a presumptive indication of their being derived from God is their simplicity and plainness, notwithstanding the sublimity of the subjects of which they treat, and the extent of the system of truth and morals which they embrace. Any religion, which comes from God, must, from its very design, be adapted for the instruction of the mass of mankind. And it was the glory of *the gospel*, in its commencement, that *it was preached to the poor*. In fulfilling this great and necessary end of popular edification, therefore, nothing would have been more preposterous than to propose to them abstruse and speculative principles of science, or to discuss before them such abstract questions as were agitated by the philosophers in the presence of their disciples. It was requisite that religion should propound the objects, the laws, and the motives of duty, in the most plain and intelligible form, that they might be easily comprehended by the most unimproved understanding, while they should afford high matter to employ the sublimest, and most cultivated reason. Most remarkably do we see these characters meet in the gospel. And perhaps no fact

can better demonstrate how admirably it is fitted to be the instructor of *the people*, than the clear and general knowledge which we now find among all ranks of men, on the subjects of our moral duties, and our religious hopes. A common labourer, instructed, as the church requires for the poorest of her sons, would have been esteemed a philosopher among philosophers themselves, judging only from the reasonableness and excellence of his moral and theological doctrines. But, if they were to enter with him into such disquisitions on the principles of these doctrines as were common in their schools; if they were to endeavour to trace them to their primary elements, and again to pursue them through regular deductions to their ultimate conclusions, guarding against objections and doubts at every step, and parrying, or solving a thousand knotty questions in their progress, would not this plain man be confounded? He would be lost in the intricacy of their speculations, and would not be able at last to recognise his own principles. Such reflections add no small value to the plainness of the gospel; and may, perhaps, justly be said to afford a presumption of the divinity of that system which has thus been able to bring down the sublimest subjects to the level of ordinary minds.

I subjoin here, that *the efficacy* of the holy scriptures, by which is meant their tendency, and powerful influence to produce holiness of life in those who truly believe them, is often adduced by pious writers as an internal character, and presumptive argument of their divine original. This argument is supported partly from reason and partly from experience. In the former view, we should consider the motives and assistances of duty afforded by the gospel, and the awful and commanding authority by which it is enjoined. The motives presented to the view, and urged upon the conscience of a believer in the gospel, are of so transcendent and interesting a nature, as evidently to give it an operation, and effect upon the heart, which can never be perceived from any system of mere reason and philosophy. Feeble are the motives of reason alone to combat the force of the passions. But the gospel, by *bringing life and immortality to light*, by proposing to mankind the glorious and awful retributions of eternity, by the doctrine of a divine providence, of a universal witness and judge of human actions, and even of the thoughts of the heart, has given a force and effect to the laws of duty and holiness, which could not be derived from any representations of the present convenience and satisfactions of a virtuous life, however eloquently they might be depicted in the discourses

of the learned, but which the heart is so often able to set aside, or to render doubtful in the moments of temptation and of action.

Consider, in the next place, the authority with which the gospel speaks to the heart of a true believer, who receives it as the immediate and infallible word of God. Reason, when it would prescribe a law of duty to mankind must often speak in the breast with a very faint and doubtful voice amidst the prejudices and prepossessions of selflove, and the importunities of appetite and passion, and amidst the dubious and circuitous deductions by which it is often obliged to arrive at its conclusions. And it can never prescribe to *the people* a rule which, in this uncertainty can clearly reach to every case in the practice of life. But the authority of God gives to his law a clearness which cannot be mistaken, and a power and control which come home to every thought and purpose of the soul. Before the majesty of his authority, the turbulence of appetite, and the deceitfulness of the heart are overawed, and brought to submission. And the authority of God is exhibited in the gospel as possessing claims to our obedience, and a power to command it, which reason alone cannot exert. He enforces his law by all the rights of creation; by all the obligations of his love in the redemption of the world; and by all the ter-

rors of his justice which shall, at last, decide, by this law, the eternal destinies of mankind.

Among the most effectual means of holiness, pious writers have ever considered the promised aids of the holy Spirit: they are, therefore, to be classed under that head of presumptive proof of which I am now treating: *the efficacy of the scriptures.*

To a nature corrupted as ours is, the difficulty of conquering its sinful tendencies and habits, and turning its whole force and activity into an habitual love of virtue, of holiness, and of God, that is, of regenerating and new creating it, might justly be regarded as insuperable without supernatural, and divine assistance. At least, convinced sinners who feel only the difficulties of religion, and who, in repeated efforts perfectly to obey the law of God, and to overcome the power of sin in their hearts, must be sensible only of their own weakness, would be ready to sink into despondency, or relapse into their natural indolence, and love of indulgence, unless they could find some hope in the promised aid of the holy Spirit. If, then, in maintaining the efficacy of the gospel, to promote holiness of life, against unbelievers, we should not be at liberty to assume the reality of the influences of the Spirit, which would completely decide the question; yet the promise, and hope of his gracious and effectual assistance is calculated to

encourage the perseverance, and reanimate the diligent and faithful endeavours of every believer, and may, therefore, be justly reckoned among the efficient means which the gospel possesses of promoting true holiness, and reproducing on the heart of man the image of his Creator.

Finally, this argument is supported by experience. I might here mention, in the first place, the great and manifest effect which the gospel has ever had in producing holiness of life wherever it has been received with a sincere faith. But I have chiefly in view that proof of its divinity which it carries to the heart of every real christian by his own experience of its sanctifying influence. This is a proof indeed that is entirely personal, and does not belong to the general evidences of the truth of christianity. Yet, to a sincere believer, who has experienced this holy and renovating power, and thus may be said to have the testimony in himself, and this is the principal view in which the pious writers I have mentioned propose this argument, there is, perhaps, no other proof which comes home with such life, and force, and persuasion to his heart. The argument, however, which I take to be in its nature very solid and just, is calculated, and intended rather for the confirmation of the faith of the believer, than the conviction of the unbeliever.

LECTURE XIX.

Of the Consistency of the Scriptures with themselves, and
with the State of the World.

ANOTHER internal character of the sacred scriptures, which affords a presumptive argument of their truth, is their *consistency*. This may be considered under two views: their consistency with themselves, and their consistency with the state of the world.

That any work, the production of one author, and embracing a code of legislation, or system of morals, how extensive soever, founded on his peculiar opinions, should be regularly deduced from definite principles, should aim at one end, and be found coherent in all its parts, would have in it nothing surprising. It would be a natural consequence of genius, and sound judgment in the writer. But, in the scriptures we perceive, not the work of one author, nor of one age, but the gradual development of a grand scheme of providence, and of divine grace towards mankind, commencing with the origin, and carried on through

the whole series of time, till the close of the canon of the New Testament, in the accomplishment and illustration of which an immense number of persons must have cooperated throughout successive ages, not connected with one another, and not acting, as far as appears to human view, under any common direction. One dispensation follows and is built upon another. The same spirit, the same principles of theology, of piety, and morals pervade the whole; the same spiritual promises and hopes are gradually unfolded through thousands of years, and conducted to their ultimate accomplishment. Here is a vast concatenation of events intimately linked together, and depending upon one another; here is a unity of plan in this great system continued down through different dispensations of the mercy of God to the world, tending to fulfil one great design, the salvation of mankind through a Redeemer; of the astonishing development of which design, continued through such a long period, no reasonable account can be given, unless we suppose the whole to be under the immediate guidance and direction of heaven. Plans laid by human contrivance are not so permanent, and, if I may use the term, so continuous. There is no example, in human affairs, of successive generations taking up one design, unfolding it by degrees in a long course

of ages, and carrying it, at length, to its ultimate completion. From the character and state of human nature, its limited, and discordant views, this is perhaps impossible. We do not perceive the various schools of philosophy concurring long in the same systems of physics, or of morals. One leader of a sect differs from another; the disciple differs from his master; the principles on which their respective theories are built are continually changing. But in the holy scriptures we find one uniform consistent design pursued from generation to generation. Amidst all the variations which in a long succession of ages must have occurred in the state of society, in the manners of men, in their habits of thinking, and in the external forms and usages of the church itself, we still perceive the same doctrines concerning the nature of God, and the duties of man; we still discern the same principles of morals, the same worship of the heart required in true religion, the same high and eternal motives of duty urged upon the conscience, the same promised Saviour exhibited to our faith, the same plan of divine grace, distinguished only by the additional lights from time to time thrown upon it as it approached its final accomplishment. In this consistency, then, we behold a moral phenomenon so different from whatever

takes place in the plans and designs of men, as to afford no slight presumption that the whole, from its commencement to its consummation, has been under the wise and gracious direction of the Spirit of God. The same Spirit seems to have inspired the holy patriarchs, the great legislator of Israel, the long succession of the Hebrew prophets, and the evangelists and apostles of our blessed Lord.

There is another light in which the consistency of the scriptures may be considered, which merits a more extended illustration: it is their conformity with the actual state of the world. Truth is always consistent with itself, and with all other truths. Error, though it may be disguised, and to superficial observation, may seem to bear a semblance of truth; yet in such a wide field of moral, historical, and natural science, as is embraced in the holy scriptures, it is extremely improbable that any scheme of falsehood and imposture, fabricated especially in such an early age, should not contain many discrepancies with the actual system, moral or physical, of the world, which would be made more and more manifest by the improvements of science. But improvements in genuine science have hitherto only more clearly elucidated and confirmed the doctrines of the scriptures, and especially the facts of the sacred history. Here

we see the depravity of human nature, the existence of which is demonstrated by a most melancholy experience, not only asserted, but accounted for, and referred to a most natural source. Here we see a remedy provided for this universal corruption, conformable to the hopes of virtue, adequate to the fears of guilt, agreeing with the soundest principles of reason, yet such as reason could never have discovered. Here you trace the origin of nations in the immediate descendants of the great postdiluvian father of the race; and here the different mythologies of so many people, and their varying traditions, receive a reasonable interpretation, and are reunited as in a common centre.

Instead of attempting to present to your view this wide field in its full extent, I shall select only a few instances of the remarkable correspondence existing between the sacred writings, and the moral history and actual state of the world, which, when assembled together, may furnish to a candid mind, one, among the innumerable presumptions of their truth which meet us on every side.

The original innocence of our first parents, so conformable to the expectations which we should naturally frame from the goodness of God; and their

lamentable fall in consequence of the abuse which they made of their privileges; and the corruption of the whole race descending from them, so unhappily verified by experience, are facts clearly taught in the holy scriptures, and derive a presumptive evidence, of a very strong nature, from the early traditions and history of all nations. For, if the doctrine of Moses be founded in truth, which, independently of the divine inspiration by which we believe he was guided, possesses the highest degree of probability, that all mankind have sprung from the same parents, who had long held a familiar intercourse with God, and, notwithstanding their fall, still continued to be the subjects of his gracious instruction and care, and were, at length, restored to his favour by repentance; and if, when the primitive world was overwhelmed for its crimes, it be true that the new world was re-peopled by one of the best and wisest of his descendants, instructed by his wisdom and experience, and possessing equal piety, we should expect to find vestiges of these, and of many other truths most important to human happiness for men to know, among all the early nations who immediately sprung from him. Such traditions have accordingly been found*

* See Lecture II.

in almost every nation any remnants of whose histories have survived to our age. From these primitive nations they have been communicated to those who sprung up after them, but blended, as was to be expected, in a long course of time, with various fables which obscure the truth, and often give it an air of fiction. The sacred scriptures, by the simplicity and verisimilitude of their narration, and by the important truths and consequences with which it is connected, evidently appear to give us the genuine source of these traditions, stripped of the fabulous circumstances with which they were charged.

Those who have the smallest acquaintance with the Greek and Roman poets know that they abound with allegorical fables intended to represent the primitive innocence and felicity of man, and the miseries which afterwards fell upon the whole race in consequence of sin.* Passing from the Greeks to their masters, the Egyptians, the Chaldeans, the Indians and other eastern nations, we find among them the same doctrines, only clothed in different symbolical representations. The Egyptians speak of the first peaceful reign of Osiris, in which the most

* These are so plainly and strikingly exhibited to us in the fables of the golden, and the iron age, that neither the design, nor the origin of these fables can easily be mistaken.

perfect happiness prevailed over the earth; afterwards, of the ravages of Typhon, *the great principle of evil*, who introduced misery with crime among men; and, finally, of the universal restoration of peace and happiness, when Osiris, who has been slain by Typhon, shall be restored to life, and again triumph over *the power of evil*.^{*} To the same effect is the doctrine of the ancient bramins of India, as it is represented by Strabo:† “Onesicritus, says that historian, being sent by Alexander the Great, to inform himself of the life, manners, and doctrines of the bramins, or gymnosophists, found a bramin named Calanus, who taught him that, in the origin of nature, plenty reigned through all the world. Milk, and wine, and honey and oil, flowed from fountains: but men having abused this felicity, God deprived them of it, and condemned them to labour for the sustenance of their lives.” Plato, who, like all the early, and all the wisest sages of Greece, derived his theological opinions chiefly from the eastern nations, has presented to us nearly the same ideas of the original state of man. In his dialogue, entitled *Politicus*, we find the following sentiments and traditions on this subject: “In the first age of the world, God was

^{*} Chevalier Ramsay, of *Ancient Mythology*.

† Strabo. lib. 15. p. 713, 715. Paris edit. an. 1620.

the prince and father of all. He then governed it by himself, as he now governs it by inferior deities. All men were subject to the influence of right reason, and the love of order. In those happy days, the fertile fields yielded fruits, and corn without the labours of husbandry. Men needed no clothing to cover them. They experienced no inclement seasons; and they rested their bodies upon beds of turf of a perpetual verdure. Then followed the degeneracy of men, which was produced by their forsaking the infinite source of truth and good, for inferior gratifications. After this degradation of spirits, Saturn, the master of the universe, quitted the reins of empire, and concealed himself in an inaccessible retreat. The foundations of the world were shaken by motions contrary to its first principles and last end. It lost its beauty and order; and then it was that good and evil were blended together."

And, if we may yield to certain learned missionaries of France the credit which appears to be due both to their great learning, and their long residence in the capital, and near the court of the empire of China, we find here, in the utmost extremities of the East, in a nation the most ancient and unmixed now existing in the world, whose history reaches back nearer to the beginning of things than the records of any

other people except those of the patriarchal families by Moses, an astonishing resemblance between their traditions and mythology, and the account given in the sacred writings, of the primitive state of man. They represent the original seat of human nature to have been "in a delightful garden, on the summit of a lofty mountain." "The earth brought forth spontaneously whatever was necessary for the sustenance and happiness of man." "After enjoying, for a time, this innocence and happiness, he fell from it by his own fault."* The Chinese, it is said, have lost the proper interpretation of these fables; and suppose that they refer to some events in their national history beyond the memory of all records. But, their evident correspondence with the original traditions of other nations, demonstrates that they all have had one source. Such a striking resemblance in the opinions of nations so remote, and so utterly disconnected from one another, could not have arisen by accident. They must have had a common origin. And what origin so natural as that which is pointed out in the sacred scriptures? Independently of other proofs of the truth of the narration of Moses, does it not carry on its face the highest probability that

* Father Du Halde quotes these passages from one of the sacred books of the Chinese, which they call Chiking:

the father of the whole human family, coming pure from the hands of his Creator, had his obedience and fidelity put to some reasonable probation? And what can be more probable than that the successive fertility and barrenness, beauty and deformity of the globe, the order and irregularity of the elements, the felicity and misery of the successive states of man, were the sanctions of that law given him by God? And after examining all the traditions of so many nations, as far as we have access to ascertain them, is there any in which all the others can be so harmoniously reunited as the beautiful and interesting account which the sacred author has given of the paradisiacal state of our primitive parents?

Most of the ancient poets, and mythologists speak of the primitive men as if they had appeared upon the earth in tribes at once, generated, they know not by what power. Moses alone derives the whole human race from one original pair created immediately by the hand of God, and placed upon the new earth to people, and to form it. This idea, so pious, so philosophical, and so conformable to the primitive state of the world, as far as the most curious researches into antiquity have been able to trace it, was certainly contrary to first appearances, and to the obvious conclusions of the scanty science of that age.

Different portions of the world present mankind to us under such great varieties in their figure, their complexion, and their whole aspect, as would seem, on a superficial view, to force the conclusion upon us that they belong to different classes of animated nature. This seems to have been the prevalent opinion of many ages posterior to that of Moses; and this would have been the most natural impression on the mind of Moses himself, judging only from sensible appearances, and the imperfect lights of the philosophy of his time. But he was guided by a higher instructor. And, although the progress of science in these latter ages has confirmed the doctrine of the great Jewish legislator upon this subject, and improvements in philosophy have developed natural causes sufficient to diversify the original ground of the human constitution, whatever that may have been, and to impress upon it all the varieties of complexion, figure, and aspect, which are found in all the nations of the earth; yet as the science of that age was not competent to account for these extraordinary effects, he must have asserted the fact on the authority of that inspiration which he claimed to possess; and the claim of inspiration, if it be not well founded, never runs so great a risk of detection as when, without the knowledge of prin-

ciples, it delivers conclusions, or asserts facts, which must afterwards be verified, or refuted by the genuine improvements of philosophy. Philosophy has verified this fact, that nature possesses causes which, in their ordinary operation, are sufficient to create all the varieties that in different nations and climes are seen in the human physiognomy, and has rescued from the infidel an objection which he thought decisive against the sacred history.*

I have said also that the account of Moses is conformable to the primitive state of the world, as far as diligent research into antiquity has been able to ascertain it. For, we find all nations who have any records, or probable traditions remaining of their earliest times, springing from nearly the same parts of middle Asia: and their different traditions, or histories, as far as they possess any clearness or authenticity, reach back nearly to the same epoch, a little posterior to the scripture era of the general deluge. All the ancient monuments of the most distinguished European nations concur to demonstrate that they derived their origin from the East. The Chinese have a tradition that Fohi, their first empe-

* The author has formerly published a short tract upon this subject which he is now engaged in reviewing, enlarging, and preparing for the press.

ror, came into that country from the West. India, Phenicia, Egypt received their ancestors from the North. The whole radiating from some point near the central parts of the Asiatic continent, agreeably to the account of Moses, who lays the true foundation of the fraternity of nations, and of that universal philanthropy which ought to unite mankind together, by assuring us that God hath made of one blood all nations to dwell on the face of the whole earth.

Here then we behold a consistency with the actual state of the world, to which there were thought to exist insuperable objections; which would probably not have been suggested by the learning of that age, but which has been abundantly verified by the improvements which modern ages have made in natural science, and by a more accurate and extended acquaintance with human nature, and the history and traditions of nations, than could be obtained by antiquity with its imperfect knowledge of the arts of navigation. And it is with no small satisfaction we see that the improvements, continually making in human science, are also shedding new illustrations on the sacred writings.

LECTURE XX.

Consistency of the Scriptures with the State of the World.

The Universal Deluge. Civilization of the Earliest Nations after this Event. Common Doctrines of Religion, Morals, and Science in all these Nations.

THE universal deluge, as it is represented in the history of Moses, furnishes another and most interesting fact which is remarkably verified by the visible state of the whole globe of the earth. The vestiges of this great catastrophe are found in every region throughout the world. The productions of the ocean are lodged in the highest mountains, and are found in the deepest mines and quarries; they are discovered at the remotest distance from the sea, and are deposited in the heart of rocks which appear to have been once in a state of solution. The products of various regions and climes, the most remote from each other, appear to have been interchanged by the violence and irregularity of the waves and currents of *the great deep*. Accord-

ing to the testimony of the celebrated monsieur Bailly, impressions of the leaves of certain trees and shrubs peculiar to India, and of the skeletons of certain fish found, at present, only in the Indian Ocean, are still to be seen in several quarries of France. This philosopher, indeed, has assumed an extraordinary hypothesis to account for the fact; which is so simply and easily accounted for by admitting the Mosaic history of the deluge. But monsieur Bailly was one of those philosophers to whom every thing appeared less incredible than his bible. He supposes that the earth is a portion of matter which once formed a part of the body of the sun; but being struck off by some violent impulse, perhaps of a comet, from that fiery globe, it was originally in a state of combustion. Having receded to its present distance, as it gradually cooled, the first habitable temperature, he supposes, took place at the poles. In process of time, the equatorial heats, having forsaken the arctic circle, reigned in those regions which are now embraced in the temperate latitudes, receding, however, more and more towards the middle zone of the earth, while the cold by degrees invaded the extremities of the North and the South. It was, according to the hypothesis of this writer, when the temperature of India prevailed in France that those

productions which we now esteem to be peculiarly of Indian growth, flourished in Europe, and left their impressions in the heart of stones which time has formed round them.* It will be sufficient barely to have recited this hypothesis to discredit it with you. And I repeat it to you only as one example of those innumerable and wild conjectures to which an impious ingenuity has given birth, whenever it has forsaken the guidance of holy writ, and endeavoured to account for the phenomena of the universe independently of the immediate power of the Creator, and the government of divine providence.

That the ocean has once covered the whole globe is evident to all persons who have had an opportunity to examine its interior structure, as far as the ingenuity and industry of man have been able to penetrate it. Besides the marine productions which are every where deposited in the bowels of the earth, the regular subsiding of its strata is an invincible proof that all the elements of the globe, the liquid, and the solid have once been intimately mingled and blended together, and that they have become separated by a gradual and regular process. If it should be alleged that all those natural phenomena, which demonstrate that the earth has once been covered by

* Bailly's Letters to Voltaire.

the ocean, and which have usually been ascribed to a general deluge, may be effects merely of that chaotic state in which this globe may have existed before it received by time, and the natural operation of the laws of matter, its present order and form, it may justly be replied, that chaos, indeed, would confusedly mingle all the elements together, but could never give birth to regularly organized bodies, or be the source of animal or vegetable life. The great masses, therefore, of the exuvix of marine animals, and the collections of vegetable substances found in many places deposited far beneath the surface of the earth, and far from the bed of the ocean, could never have been the productions of a chaotic state, and could never have been deposited in the places where they are now found, but by the overflowing of the waters of the sea, and the solution of the solid parts of the globe, long after it had been reduced to perfect harmony and order, and fitted for the production and nourishment of life. This is a state of things agreeing better with the Mosaic account of the period, and circumstances of the general deluge, than with any theory which has ever been formed to solve these phenomena.*

* The system of Buffon, which is also in some degree conformed to the system of Moses, assigns a plausible account of the marine productions found in the bowels of the earth. He sup-

Besides the natural proofs of an universal deluge which are spread throughout the earth, traditions of this extraordinary catastrophe are found to exist, with surprising uniformity, in the tales, odes, and early histories of all nations. Admitting the fact as it is recorded by Moses, this was to be expected.

poses, agreeably to the scripture history, that, originally, the globe was covered by the ocean to a great depth; and that, by the natural effect of currents and of winds, islands and ridges were gradually formed, which shot to considerable heights above the surface of the waters. To these elevated ridges attractions were added by degrees, from the natural effects of alluvion, till the present continents were, at length, formed. During this long continued process, the various productions of the ocean, and different vegetable substances from the higher grounds, floated down by the rivers, might be intimately mingled with those accretions which were continually making to the lands.

According to this scheme, the earth must have been long formed before it could be a fit habitation for man. It is represented in the sacred writings also to have been first rendered a proper residence for him before he was created to cultivate it, but in a much shorter time, and by a more immediate interposition of divine power. Buffon seems desirous of avoiding the idea of *creation*. But let philosophers pursue the order and formation of the universe by the agency of natural causes, as far back into time as they please, they must come at last to an original, creating power, or make matter eternal, account for all things by an eternal succession of changes, and establish atheism by rendering a divine and intelligent power useless. That man, and other animals could not have derived their existence, in the beginning, merely from the laws of matter and motion, or any combination of heat and moisture with other elements, in the then recent

The founders of the primitive nations having themselves been delivered, along with their pious father, from the overwhelming ruin, or being the immediate descendants of some branch of the preserved family, would hand down the memory of it to their posterity. So fearful an event could not soon be forgotten. In these traditions the whole earth is represented to have been overwhelmed with water to a vast depth.

state of the globe, must be evident to those who reflect that we never see the least approach to animal organization in those parts of the globe, and there are many of them, as in the immense marshes of the torrid, or even of the temperate zones, where the same causes still continue to operate with their full force. In these we never see even an abortive attempt towards the formation of a human being; not a limb, muscle, or sinew has ever been found endeavouring to perfect the organization of the entire animal, and work itself into life. The idea of creation given us in the sacred scriptures is most conformable to reason, and to all that experience has taught us of the powers of nature. But according to the system of Mr. Buffon, the globe of the world must have been many ages in assuming that form and consistence which would prepare it to be a fit receptacle for the animals that inhabit the land; and then we must have recourse to a most absurd hypothesis, or to the power of creation for their existence: a power which would be much more rationally resorted to in the beginning, as the cause not only of their existence, but of that of the world itself. Then the account of those marine exuvix found in the bowels of the earth, which might be raised on Mr. Buffon's hypothesis, must be rejected, and the real cause of them be sought for in the general deluge, which, Moses has informed us, covered the face of the whole globe, and, for a time, mingled together all its elements.

All the inhabitants of the world perished in the waves, one single man alone with his family excepted, who was preserved in a vessel or ark, which conveyed them to the summit of a lofty mountain, on which it rested on the subsiding of the waters; whence they afterwards descended to repopulate the new world. This second father of the human race is called by various names* in different countries; but in the traditions of the pagan nations many circumstances are mingled which are evidently fabulous. Whereas the history of Moses is so simple, so conformable to the actual state of the world, and coincides so well with the origin of ancient nations, as far as they can be traced towards their commencements, and especially with that great epoch beyond which genuine history is never found to extend; and we see in it so plainly the moral end intended in this event by the great Governor of the universe, that hardly any doubt can remain but that this is the true type whence all these fables have been taken.

Although the interior structure of the earth itself affords demonstrative evidence that it has once been entirely covered by the waters of the ocean, yet the fact has boldly been pronounced to be impossible. It

* Xisuthrus in Chaldea; Belgomer in India; Peyrun in China; Deucalion in Greece.

is said, there is not water sufficient on the whole globe to produce a flood which would cover the highest hills under heaven to the depth of fifteen cubits, the measure which Moses has assigned. And there is no known force in nature which could protrude the ocean from its bed, or raise it so high above its ordinary level. But there appears, by the account of the sacred historian, to have been a disruption of the globe of the earth, which mingled together the elements of land and water. *The fountains of the great deep were broken up.* In such a convulsion, the waters, for a long time, would necessarily cover all things to a great depth. The force which *broke up the fountains of the great deep* would not probably expend itself in one explosion; but, continuing to act for a considerable period, would first cast up to the surface of the overwhelming deluge, or elevate to some distance above it, those vast chains of mountains which became afterwards the central strength of the different continents.* By the natural effect of tides, currents, and winds, new ridges would be formed near the primitive chains; and to these continual attritions would be added of more or less elevation, but generally declining in

* It is not improbable that the mountains in the present form of the globe are higher than those in the antediluvian world.

height towards the level of the ocean. In proportion as the ocean receded, by scooping out for itself more profound cavities by its own working, and casting up its bottom into continents and islands, those ridges which, at first, would hardly be seen above its surface, would, at length, assume the appearance of lofty mountains. For the elevation of mountains, and of the central parts of continents above the general level of the waters, does not depend on the addition of new masses of earth to their summits, but on the retrocession of the ocean. No more water, then, than now forms the mass of ocean on the globe would be requisite for all the phenomena of the general deluge.*

The scriptural account of the universal deluge, therefore, is consistent with the early traditions of all nations; is consistent with the physical history of

* This may be represented by a very simple experiment. Take any large vessel, and after filling it to a certain height with earth, pour on water to any given depth. Gather the earth from one side of the vessel, and accumulate it on the other till it be raised above the surface of the water. Here form a representation of the hills and continents on the globe, as near as may be, in the proportion which they bear to the ocean. As the water sinks into the cavities you make in collecting the earth from them, you will perceive how the hills, once covered beneath its surface, will receive continually greater apparent elevation as you add to the extent of your continents.

the world; and is consistent with those natural laws of fluids which have been most confidently pronounced to be incompatible with it.

Another example of the consistency of the sacred scriptures with the actual state of the world, is their representing the first condition of man, especially after the deluge, as being, in a very considerable degree, enlightened and civilized. This is a picture of the primitive society of mankind the more worthy of your observation because so contrary to the speculations of the philosophers, and the fables of the poets; and yet, when examined on the principles of reason, and compared with historical facts of the highest antiquity, possessing the strongest characters of verisimilitude and truth. The Greek philosophers and poets, with the moderns who have generally followed them, have represented man, in his primeval state, as a miserable savage, hardly superior to the brutes in his intellectual faculties, and greatly their inferior in the means of providing for his subsistence and comfort. The original savagism of man I have before shown to be a most improbable fiction.* Man cannot be merely an equivocal production of heat, acting on the slime of the recent globe. And if he is really the creature of God, formed by his immediate

* Lecture II.

power, and placed in this world as its supreme and governing spirit, can any supposition be more unreasonable than, that his Creator should abandon him in the first moment of his existence, to a state more forlorn and miserable than that of any other creature upon earth? Can any idea be more natural than, that his heavenly Father should, with paternal care, impart to him all the knowledge necessary both to his duty, and his comfortable subsistence? And, in the long interval between the creation and the flood, the arts and sciences, from such beginnings, must have attained a high degree of improvement. Such is the conclusion of reason, and such is the inference which necessarily results from the great architectural skill of Noah, as it is represented in the sacred history, and still more, perhaps, from that knowledge of natural science which alone could have enabled him to collect into the ark all the animals of the land, with all the different kinds of provision requisite for their subsistence. Such an ancestor must have proved an enlightened instructor to his posterity. And, if the sacred history be true, the earliest communities of the new world must have been founded on the principles of civilization, and must have exhibited no inconsiderable progress in the arts.

In perfect conformity with these results drawn from the primitive annals of the world presented to us in the sacred scriptures, we find men, in the very earliest periods after the deluge, already building cities, establishing political institutions, and exercising all the arts of civilized life. Then were laid the foundations of Babylon, so celebrated afterwards for her grandeur and beauty; and then was constructed that famous tower which remained a monument of durable and magnificent architecture to the age of the Greeks. Similar improvements and arts, similar political and civil institutions, similar moral rules of conduct, and similar historical and mythological traditions, are found in all those great eastern nations, from India to Egypt, which the scriptures inform us, sprung most immediately from the family of Noah.*

* The state of savagism probably arose at a considerable distance of time after the deluge, and in countries remote from the original seats of the family of Noah. The immediate family of the patriarch having no provision of animal food, except the few beasts preserved in the ark which were permitted to be offered in sacrifice to God, and therefore denominated clean, would be obliged, for their own subsistence, immediately to have recourse to the arts of agriculture, known to them before the deluge. And with the cultivation of the earth, civilization always commences, and the improvement of many other arts is necessarily connected. It was only after the vast forests of Europe and Scythia became again replenished with game, that vagrant and restless spirits, invited by the pleasures of the chase, abandoned

Such are the consequences which we ought to expect from the whole current and tenor of sacred history, concerning the primitive ages; and such are the facts as they have actually taken place, in the periods immediately posterior to the deluge, according to the annals and traditions of those nations who have been able to trace their history farthest back towards the beginning of time.

the constraints and labours of civil life, and, remote from their countrymen, sought at once subsistence and amusement by the bow and the spear. All other arts were, of course, sunk in this one; and man, in those regions, became savage. Hence savagism was the primitive condition of the rude inhabitants of Greece and Italy. Hence the deplorable pictures which the Greek and Latin poets have drawn of the first men. And hence the philosophers of those nations, judging of every other country by their own, have represented the savage, to be the primitive, state of all mankind. If man had been originally savage, we never should have seen a civilized nation. The indolence and unrestrained liberty of that state, with the pleasures of the chase, have charms for rude man which hardly any other advantages can ever induce him to abandon. We have numerous examples on the frontiers of the United States, in the vicinity of the immense forests to the west, which demonstrate with what facility men accustomed to the habits of civilized life will renounce them for the independent liberty and indolence of the savage; but hardly ever has any motive been found sufficient to induce a savage to adopt the habits, and submit to the constraints of civil society. Several religious denominations have endeavoured to introduce christianity and civilization among the aboriginal tribes of Indians: the government of the United States has, on many occasions, employed all its influence to induce certain tribes to submit to a more fixed mode

Mr. Bailly, whom I have before mentioned, in his famous letters to Voltaire, admits the fact, that, at this early and remote period, all these nations had arrived at a high degree of civilization; and that the same arts and sciences are found among them all, advanced nearly to the same grade of improvement,

of life, and to provide for their subsistence with more certainty than they can now do, by agriculture instead of hunting. Every attempt has been in vain till lately; when the population of the United States surrounding some of their tribes on every side, and circumscribing their hunting grounds within narrow limits, has compelled them, in some instances, to receive the instruction, and aid offered them by our government, and to adopt a partial agriculture. No savage nation, by any gradual course of improvement originating within itself, and conducted only by its own efforts, independent of the influence and assistance of other nations already civilized, ever rose to a state of civilization. The Greeks were civilized by colonies from Egypt and Phenicia, and the Italians, at a later period, by colonies from Asia and from Greece. So erroneous is that principle of philosophers that human society commenced in savagism. And so erroneous is another principle supported by lord Kaims, that, if man had been originally in a civilized state, he never could have degenerated into savage life. And I may add, so consistent are the holy scriptures with the real state of human nature, when justly and rationally considered, and with the genuine and original state of the world when examined by the purest and most authentic lights of history. A consistency which would be the more wonderful, considering the comparative infancy of science in that age, and considering its opposition to the whole current of philosophic prejudice, if we could not resolve it into the superior direction of the Spirit of truth, which guided the sacred historian.

although the steps by which they ascended to that height cannot now be traced. They are found at once enlightened and civilized, without having passed, as far as appears to us, through any previous state of ignorance or barbarism. Unfriendly to revelation, and of course rejecting the mosaic account of the deluge, and of the general circumstances of mankind as connected with that event, he has recourse to a most extraordinary hypothesis, utterly unsupported by any monument of history, or even tradition, to explain the early improvement of the eastern nations, and the uniformity of their progress in the various arts. There are vestiges, says he, of a common science in all the nations of the East, which it is evident they did not invent themselves, because they have in their philosophy the conclusions without the principles; and in the arts, the practical rules without the theory on which they are established. He infers, therefore, that they must have derived them from some more enlightened nation anterior in time to themselves, by whom those theories and principles were invented, and those scientific conclusions, and practical rules were discovered. From some astronomical calculations which were preserved among them, and which applied with accuracy only to a high northern latitude, he concludes that this polish-

ed empire, of which no memory, no monument, no tradition remains, must have existed in the north of Asia. Out of its fragments, when in time it became broken to pieces, he supposes, arose those nations towards the south, Assyria, Babylon, India, and others, who inherited the remains of its sciences and arts. Hence these nations were so uniform in the progress which they had made in all liberal and mechanical improvements. Hence we find nearly the same moral and religious doctrines from the Indus to the Nile. Hence they communicated their knowledge as the dictates of tradition, rather than as discoveries which they had made by their own researches. Hence their instructions, like those of the pythagorean school, consisted rather in the prescriptions of authority, than in the investigations of reason. What a train of improbable suppositions is here brought together to account for a fact which is so simply and naturally explained by the sacred history.* The antediluvian world, though corrupted, was enlightened. Noah, a wise and good man, brought with him into the new world all the science of the old. This he would naturally impart to

* This is one of innumerable examples, which the systems of modern philosophy furnish, to show what incredible fictions infidelity is ever ready to resort to, rather than embrace the simplicity of the gospel.

his immediate descendants, and they to the families which sprung from them, and the kingdoms founded by them. Accordingly the earliest societies of men after the deluge, of which there are any records in history, were distinguished by wise religious and civil institutions, and by their knowledge of agriculture, architecture, astronomy,* and many other useful and ornamental arts. All this is conformable to the sacred oracles, and to those few monuments of authentic history which are yet preserved from the wrecks of the most ancient nations of the world; all of whom trace up their genuine annals to a period not remote from the scripture era of the general deluge. A great part of them, indeed, through a vain ambition of magnifying their antiquity, have prefaced these annals with certain extravagant and fictitious eras of the reign of gods and demigods. Whatever is authentic we find consistent with the history of the holy scriptures: the rest is composed of the wild reveries of their priests and astronomers, who have endeavoured to accommodate certain periods of the celestial bodies to imaginary epochs in their civil history.†

* Many ages after this period they were the masters of the Greeks in these arts.

† The Egyptians fancied to themselves thirty dynasties of their

In treating of the consistency of the holy scriptures, with the moral as well as physical state of the world, I might draw a presumptive argument for them from the views which they present to us of the actual and universal depravity of human nature, and the cause to which they ascribe it, so much more reasonable and natural than any which philosophy has assigned. Another favourable presumption might be derived from the origin to which they attribute the practice of sacrificing that obtained among all nations before the coming of Christ. This is a mode of worship to which men could hardly have been led by any natural dictate of reason; otherwise it would probably not have ceased. How could the blood of beasts be conceived to be a proper expiation for human guilt? Or how could it be supposed that smoking altars would be grateful to the Deity, or would be a just expression of the gratitude of man to his Creator? But the holy scriptures furnish so reasonable an account, and present to us so consistent an object of this rite, in

gods and demigods. These were created merely to fill up the period of one entire revolution of the zodiac, according to their computations. One revolution, together with the primeval reign of Saturn, and some complemental periods amounted, according to them, to 36,525 years occupied principally by their dynasties. Univ. Hist. vol. 1. p. 196. vol. 2. p. 18. The Indians were still more extravagant in their fictions.

the reference which it must have borne, from the beginning, to the great sacrifice which was to be offered up for the sins of the world, as leads the mind to rest with no small degree of satisfaction on the truth of the exposition which they make of the original ground of this universal mode of worship.

On these topics, however, I shall not dilate, as I hasten to bring to a close the considerations which I had proposed to offer to you on the presumptive evidences of our holy religion.

LECTURE XXI.

Presumptive Evidences of the Truth of Christianity. The Character of its Author: the Instruments he employed to promote it: the beneficial Consequences which have resulted from its Publication and Reception in the World.

AMONG the presumptive evidences of the truth of the christian religion, none, perhaps, are stronger than that which arises from the character of its blessed Author. No other man has ever existed, who, in his intercourse with the world, was so blameless, so amiable, and, in every attribute which deserves the esteem of mankind, so worthy our veneration and love. Such a character would very ill accord with the duplicity and hypocrisy of imposture. As the union of the divine with the human nature in the person of the Redeemer is a doctrine purely of revelation, we are not at liberty, while only establishing the proofs of the gospel, to assume that principle in order to exalt the virtues and perfections of Jesus Christ. We must consider him merely as he appeared to the view of men, claiming to be the

founder of a new religion derived immediately from God, that we may judge how far his character corresponded with his high pretensions, and how far these pretensions were supported by such eminent virtues, and such freedom from error and imperfection in conduct, as ought to be expected in a messenger of heaven, the example and instructor of mankind. That he appeared, in the eyes of his disciples, after their long and intimate intercourse with him, and their daily observation of his life and manners, worthy of their highest love and veneration, and worthy of the heavenly original which he claimed, is strongly expressed in the following declaration of saint John: *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us; and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.** This whole passage, I presume, refers, not to his transfiguration, nor to any of those appearances in which he exhibited himself to his disciples immediately before his ascension, but to that *beauty of holiness*, that *glorious* display of virtue and perfection which shone through his whole life, and which, in every part of it, was *full of grace and truth*: that is, conspicuously distinguished by the most amiable condescension, and benignity of dis-

* John. 1, 14.

position and manners,* and by the most undissembled and inviolable sincerity.

Among the most distinguishing, as well as the most venerable, characteristics of Jesus Christ was his piety towards God. The universal government of divine providence he devoutly acknowledged in every event of his life. And, in the immediate prospect of his most painful death, and, afterwards, in the midst of those excruciating sufferings, so studiously aggravated by the ingenuity and malice of wicked men, you perceive no other emotions but those of compassion, and forgiveness to his enemies, but the most perfect meekness, submission, and resignation to the will of God. Often you see him retire apart from the admiration, or the curiosity of the multitude, and the company of his disciples, for the purposes of secret devotion, and, on the sabbath day, he is careful to exhibit an instructive example of devout attendance on the public institutions of religion in the assemblies of the synagogue. Ever warm, humble, and affectionate in his devotional exercises, you perceive in them, however, nothing of those ecstasies, nor of those bold familiarities with heaven,

* This is frequently the meaning of the original term *χαρις*, and, perhaps, always when applied, as it is here, in the description of character.

which distinguish the spirit of enthusiasm. And in that model of prayer which he gave his disciples, which, for comprehension of thought, for a just selection of the objects of prayer, and for the true spirit of devotion has never been equalled, you find the genuine fervors of piety united with the most calm, dignified, and rational expression of the devout feelings of the heart.

When we descend to that part of his character which was exhibited in his intercourse with mankind, it is, in the highest degree amiable and interesting, and worthy our admiration and imitation. The spirit of meekness and humility breathed through his whole life and manners; and his benevolence and charity knew no bounds. Always engaged in instructing the ignorant and comforting the afflicted, you behold him continually surrounded with multitudes of poor, of maimed, of blind, of diseased, listening to his instructions and consolations, and seeking relief from that benevolent power which he was ever ready to exercise in their behalf. His love of sincerity and truth would never suffer him to disguise his designs, even when he knew that his enemies were only waiting for his declaration to wreak upon him their most cruel and murderous rage. Yet, it was in the midst of the sufferings inflicted by their

cruelty and rage that the united virtues of his character shone with the brightest lustre; submission to the will of God; zeal for the happiness and salvation of mankind, the great object for which he laboured upon earth; the unruffled meekness of his nature under the injuries and indignities of his persecutors; compassion and forgiveness towards his enemies in the midst of the tortures which he endured from their hands; the dutiful affection and care of a son towards a destitute and afflicted mother standing at the foot of his cross, which no bodily torment could suspend in his heart for a moment; the whole crowned by that last fervent act of benevolence and devotion in which he expired: *Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.* How unlike an impostor! How far superior to the life, and the death of heroes, or philosophers! Rousseau in one of those moments of warm and generous admiration of virtue which he sometimes felt, comparing the death of Jesus Christ with that of Socrates, gives to the founder of christianity an infinite preference to the Athenian sage.

This character of Jesus Christ, indeed, is drawn from the memoirs of his life written by disciples, who may be supposed to have coloured it with a pencil tinged by their partiality for a beloved

master. But let it be remembered that the gospels were evidently not written with any direct view of making the *eulogy* of Christ, but merely to present to us a narrative of his actions and discourses, which is done with the most undesigning simplicity. The character we derive from the facts as they have presented them.

To draw a uniform, consistent, and noble character, from imagination, which shall be entirely new in its principal features, is one of the most difficult works of genius, and not to be expected from men in that sphere of life in which the disciples moved. But it is still more difficult to invent a consistent, yet diversified series of actions from which the character, strongly and distinctly marked, shall naturally arise to the view of the reader. Besides, we have four separate memoirs, evidently written without any concert of their authors, which still, however, present to us the same picture of life and manners.* A biographical picture, thus depicted simply by actions, drawn by men whose plain and sound under-

* *Written without any concert of their authors;* for although they present to us nearly the same transactions, and discourses, yet it is not done with that identity either in the substance of the narration, or the order of time which would indicate preconcert, or design. On the other hand, we perceive such differences as would naturally occur in the narratives of intelligent and honest

standings enabled them only to exhibit without embellishment what they actually saw and heard, but who were utterly incapable of dramatic fiction, carries in itself the strongest claims to be received as genuine. It is, besides, so peculiar, so utterly unlike whatever had before been exhibited among men either in the history of real life, or in fiction, that it can never be conceived to be the mere creation of writers who were wholly incompetent to such essays of genius and fancy. In every view, it bears the irresistible impressions of truth and nature. A character, how worthy the messenger of peace, and salvation to mankind, who claimed the high and holy relation of being, the Son of God!

One peculiarity in the life of Jesus Christ especially merits our most serious consideration, as it demonstrates that he could not have acted on any suggestions of human policy or wisdom. In order to place it in its just light, it is necessary again to carry back our view to the state of public opinion in the

men giving, after a certain interval of time, the history of the same events, without any knowledge of each other's testimony, or any study to make them accord; and yet with such uniformity, and such consistency in the whole character, even when one introduces new facts, of which the others have not spoken, as clearly demonstrates that they are drawing from life, and that they all have the same original before them.

Jewish nation at that period. The belief that the coming of the Messiah was just at hand was then strong and universal. The Jews, proud of their exclusive relation to God as his chosen people, and impatient of the yoke which had lately been imposed upon them by the Romans, expected in their Messiah a martial prince and a conqueror, who should deliver them from the power of their enemies, and enable them to conquer in their turn. In such a state of the public sentiment and feeling, impatient, agitated, anxious, momentarily waiting for the appearance of some great deliverer, many daring spirits would naturally arise to offer themselves as leaders in the honourable and popular enterprise of rescuing the nation from its abject humiliation, and raising it to that splendor and glory so eagerly anticipated by every Jew. Minds of a fanatical and enthusiastic turn, inflamed to a degree of insanity by sympathy with the general fervor,* would imagine *themselves* to be the instruments destined by heaven to accomplish this glorious purpose. Whereas others, of a cold impiety, but of a bold and resolute temper, calculating on the possibility of turning the national ardor to their own aggrandizement, would cherish the daring ambition of usurping the government by force of arms, and placing themselves on the throne

of Judea. But, whether actuated by a spirit of fanaticism, or imposture, and under one or other of these classes all pretenders must be ranged, they would equally move under the impulse of the public sentiment, and be directed by it in their choice of the means to accomplish their end. They would, therefore, always appear at the head of armed bands. And such was the fact, according to the testimony of the cotemporary historian Josephus. For, of all the numerous impostors, who sprung up in Judea pretending to be Messiah, a little before the ministry of our Saviour, and, from that period, till the final destruction of Jerusalem, there was not one who did not attempt to support his claim by arms. Not so the Lord Jesus Christ. He deviated entirely from this course, which nature and human policy would have pointed out to him, and chose one in every respect opposite. The vain and proud expectations of the Jews he refused to gratify. He openly declared that his kingdom is not of this world. Instead of affecting the splendor of royalty, or the authority of command, he renounced all worldly pomp and grandeur. Instead of the weapons of force and compulsion, he employed only the meekness of instruction and persuasion. Instead of conciliating the favour of the Jewish nation by courting their prejudices, he

boldly and openly declared to them that their national policy, and even their national existence as the peculiar people of God, should soon come to a period. He did not allure his disciples to his party by the prospects of honour, emolument, or command, but by inculcating humility and selfdenial, and proposing to them, in his service, only arduous trials, incessant persecutions, and unrewarded labours. This is a course which not only nature, and human wisdom would not have pointed out, in the circumstances in which he chose it, but which, judging on all the acknowledged principles of probability, could only have tended to ruin his hopes. The humble, peaceful, patient, and selfdenied character which he assumed, so widely different from that to which the spirit of that age and nation would have urged him, affords ample proof that he was not governed by any maxims of worldly policy. And his success, notwithstanding the entire defect of all the measures, or precautions which human wisdom would have prescribed, and in opposition to the contempt, the indignation, and power of a whole nation, whose wounded pride, and disappointed hopes, had inflamed their passions to a degree of fury which threatened to crush him, and all his designs in an instant, supplies the strongest presumption that *the*

work was not of men but of God, who, with a silent, but irresistible operation, often confounds the counsels of the wise, and defeats the power of the mighty, and conducts the designs of his own providence, by secret, and inscrutable springs, to the most wonderful and unexpected issues.

Conformable to the character which the Saviour assumed were the instruments which he employed to propagate his religion. He chose men from the humblest walks of life, without power, without influence, without science, without eloquence; and yet, strictly forbidding every attempt to extend his doctrines by compulsion and force, he commanded them to rely for success in their mission simply on their plain unvarnished exposition of the truth, under the guidance of that divine Spirit which he promised to cooperate with their preaching. What could be expected, on every ground of human calculation, from the choice of such instruments for a work of this peculiar nature, and of such infinite magnitude and difficulty, but failure and disgrace? Could men in their rank of life, and possessing only their talents, have raised their minds to such a mighty enterprise as that of changing the moral state of the whole world? If they had been bold enough to admit the thought, was there any example in the history of hu-

man events which could have encouraged the smallest hope of success? Yet, we have seen them, in obedience to the command of their master, although with reluctance at first, under the consciousness of their own impotence, enter on this astonishing enterprise; and we have seen it, contrary to every principle of probable reasoning, gloriously accomplished in their hands. Well may we ask, then, if the choice of such instruments is not a new proof that our blessed Saviour did not take counsel of human wisdom, nor act on any plan that the cunning spirit of imposture would have dictated? And, when we contemplate the wonderful revolution which they have effected, does not the conclusion, almost irresistibly, force itself upon the mind, that they must have acted under a divine direction?*

But, omitting all other arguments of the presumptive class, I shall only further offer to your consideration that strong presumption which arises from the

* See this subject treated more at large in the 5th and 6th lectures. There, also, the argument from the rapid extension of the christian religion, which is usually treated of under the head of *presumptive evidence*, is placed in a higher rank; and I have endeavoured to derive, from an event so extraordinary, a proof, amounting almost to demonstration, of the miraculous powers with which the apostles, and primitive evangelists must have been endued.

effects which the christian religion has had on the interests, and happiness, the religious opinions, morals and manners of society. That the publication of the gospel has produced an important revolution in the moral and religious state of the world, is obvious to all who have sufficient acquaintance with the history of nations, and of human nature, to be able to compare the past with the present: and that this revolution has, upon the whole, been salutary, and has contributed, in no small degree, to the happiness of mankind, can hardly be denied by any well informed, and candid unbeliever.

The beneficial effects of the christian revelation may be considered under two views: the great and visible improvement of the world in religious and divine knowledge in consequence of the prevalence of christianity,* and the practical improvement, especially of the christian nations, in morals and manners.

* I cannot approve of the zeal of certain pious writers who pretend to find the source of all the modern improvements in science, and the arts, in the christian revelation. Men, by an excess of zeal, often do injury to the cause to which they are friends. It is true, that correct and accurate principles in any one science may have a favourable influence on others, as far as they may be affected by the mutual relation which subsists between all branches of useful knowledge. In this way, the purity and perfection of the christian theology and morals may have contributed, in several respects, to enlighten, assist, and direct the ingenious efforts of the mind.

Much has been said already, in these lectures, on the great superiority of the theological and moral system of the sacred scriptures, above all that philosophy ever taught among the disciples of human wisdom, or superstition ever substituted for religion among the vulgar. But the beneficial influence of the gospel is not to be looked for chiefly among men of science, who form but a small portion of any nation, nor to be measured principally by the excellence of its doctrines compared with the institutions of philosophy, but by the illumination which it has shed through the great mass of the people. In this class, who were once thought to be incapable of any rational consideration of those sublime subjects, do we not now find truer notions of God, purer conceptions of the worship due to him, juster principles of duty, a more perfect system of the rules of moral conduct, and higher and nobler motives to enforce those rules in practice, than were ever known even to the few sages who appeared here and there like stars in the dark night of paganism. This is certainly the greatest and sublimest effect which has ever been produced by moral instruction. Nowhere do we now behold such objects of worship as Jupiter or Juno, as Mars or Apollo, whose vices

would have been an additional stain on the reputation of the most immoral of their worshippers. Still less do we see temples erected to such deities as Bacchus or Venus; or such ridiculous, lewd, and beastly sprites as Fauns and Satyrs, as Priapus and Pan. We no longer witness the revels of a holiday substituted for the pure worship of Almighty God, which should consist in solemn acts of homage and veneration; in penitent acknowledgments of our sins, in devout meditations on the works and perfections of the Creator, in grateful recollections of his innumerable mercies, and in the pious anticipation of those heavenly and immortal hopes which offer the most powerful motives to the true believer to live virtuously, and form his best preparation to die peacefully. The offices of religion, that were performed in the pagan temples, did not, in any country, embrace the moral instruction of the people. The functions of the priesthood were all fulfilled in the regular discharge of a ritual of unmeaning, or fantastic ceremonies. Piety or good morals were not esteemed requisite even to the sacerdotal character. How different are those pious offices which are performed in our christian temples! What a school are they become to the people of that knowledge most important to the interests and happiness of mankind!

With what advantages in the church, that is, under the immediate inspection and authority of Almighty God, are they initiated in that most perfect discipline which embraces the whole compass of their duties to God and man, and provides most certainly for the happiness both of their present, and their future being! Idolatry, with its impious and immoral train, has been banished from all its ancient seats in the civilized world. For christianity has in this, and in many other respects, extended a salutary influence far beyond the nations embraced within its actual pale.

If christianity has introduced into the great mass of society a more perfect knowledge than they enjoyed before, of those moral and divine principles most useful and important to the practical understanding and discharge of all their duties, it has, in the same proportion, opened the true sources of enjoyment to all who sincerely embrace and believe its doctrines. Their happy influence will be perceived by a good man in every situation wherein he can be placed, in the composure of his spirit, in the sense of the continual presence, favour, and protection of Almighty God, in that filial affection and trust with which he confides in the divine mercy, and that security with which the spirit of faith re-

poses on the true foundation of our eternal hopes. But the gracious and beneficent power of the gospel, and the preciousness of its consolations, will be peculiarly felt under the various afflictions which God hath found it necessary or useful to introduce into the discipline of our present state of probation. There are comforts in religion which can enable the pious heart to throw off the pressure of all its sorrows. But, that I may not enter too far into disquisitions which would better become the pulpit, I will confine myself briefly to point out the consolation and support it affords the soul at the approach of death. The weakness of human nature, if it is not supported by religious hope, commonly meets this awful term of our earthly existence with extreme solicitude and anxiety. And the consciousness of guilt, which is apt to be awakened in the heart when we are approaching the presence of the Supreme Judge, and when all the illusions of the passions, and the world, which had diverted reflection, are passed away, greatly aggravates to most men the distress of dying. Their utter ignorance of all that is • beyond this life, and the fearful apprehensions natural to weakness and guilt, of what may take place hereafter, must often agitate with terror, or hang with peculiar heaviness and melancholy on the de-

parting spirit which is not enlightened by revelation. The polite and learned nations of antiquity, although they had some notions of the existence of the soul after the dissolution of the body, and some apprehensions of a future retribution to virtue, and to vice, yet had framed no clear and satisfactory ideas on these subjects on which reason could rely: all their representations of the state of departed souls, therefore, were melancholy and gloomy in the extreme.* What ineffable consolation; then, has the

* Virgil, in conducting Eneas to the mansions of the dead, represents the entrance to them surrounded with all the most horrible forms which poet fiction, or superstitious fear had ever created. This is probably no more than a symbolical representation of the terrors in which death commonly appeared to men in the pagan world, whose minds, having no clear and certain knowledge of the future to rest upon, were abandoned to the fears, at once of ignorance, and of conscious guilt. *Eneid. lib. vi. l. 273—289.*

Vestibulum ante ipsum primisque in faucibus Orci,

Luctus, et ultrices posuere cubilia Curae:

Pallentesque habitant Morbi, tristisque Senectus,

Et Metus, et malesuada Fames, et turpis Egestas,

Terribiles visu formæ: Lethumque, Laborque:

Tum consanguineus Lethi Sopor, et mala mentis

Gaudia, mortiferumque adverso in limine Bellum,

Ferreique Eumenidum thalami, et Discordia demens

Vipereum crinem vittis innexa cruentis.

Multaque præterea variarum monstra ferarum,

Centaury in foribus stabulant, Scyllæque bifformes,

Et centum geminus Briareus, ac bellua Lerna

Horrendum stridens, flammisque armata Chimæra.

Gorgones, Harpyiæque, et forma tricoloris umbræ.

gospel brought to countless millions of the human race? What comfort has it shed upon the hour of death? what illumination on the darkness of the tomb, by *bringing life and immortality to light!* It has pointed out, through Jesus Christ, the way, at once, to a happy death, and to the certain hope of a blessed and eternal existence. To the real christian, who believes its promises, and confides in its hopes, the comforts which it sheds on this most interesting crisis of our being are beyond every estimate which can be formed of their value, and must greatly strengthen in his heart that faith which has been created and nourished there by other considerations.*

* Cicero, by a single remark, in his book de Legibus, on the Eleusinian mysteries, which had been introduced into Rome, with other useful institutions from the Greeks, shows how highly he esteemed every method of strengthening in the soul this precious hope. In these sacred and secret solemnities the doctrines of the unity of God, and of a future state are supposed to have been taught. But from them the body of the people were religiously debarred, under the apprehension that they could not receive any principle which should impair their belief in the multiplicity of their local deities without degenerating into absolute impiety and atheism. These mysteries were reserved, therefore, only for a few of the wisest and most virtuous men. The doctrines taught in them, however, were not pretended to be derived from any actual, and authentic revelation, nor from any superior powers of reasoning possessed by the hierophant, or president of the ceremonies, but from venerable traditions preserved from immemorial time in the sacerdotal colleges of

the East. Yet, even this corroboration of the probable conjectures and hopes of reason appeared of the greatest value to this first of philosophers and orators. Speaking of the introduction of the mysteries into Rome; "among many other advantages, says he, which we have derived from Athens, this is the greatest; for, it has not only taught us to live cheerfully, but to die in peace, in the expectation of a happy futurity." I must be permitted to observe, however, that all these auxiliary probabilities in support of a most desirable doctrine still left the mind doubtful, as we learn from Cicero himself, in the most serious moments of trial. A new proof of the inestimable value of the christian's faith.

LECTURE XXII.

Presumptive Evidences. Improvement of the General Morals of the Nations which have embraced Christianity. Objections to the Gospel: from its having been the Supposed Cause of Persecution, and of Wars of a most fierce and bloody character for the Coercion of Conscience: from its Want of Universality: and from its Want of more clear and irresistible Evidence.

HAVING considered the improvement in divine knowledge which christianity has introduced into the world, I proposed, in the next place, to illustrate its beneficial influence on the moral state of those nations which have embraced its doctrines. It is, indeed, difficult to compare, with minute precision, the character of society in one age, or nation, with that in another. A general comparison, however, may, in this case, be instituted without much hazard of mistake.

Two observations here offer themselves to our consideration, from which, I trust, the conclusion will obviously result, that the introduction of the christian religion has been followed, in the nations

which have embraced it, with a most salutary influence, worthy of the divine origin which it claims. The first is, that between the moral doctrines, and practical rules of conduct, which men sincerely adopt and believe, and their general manners, the Author of our nature has formed a strong and certain connexion. So that, from virtuous and pious principles, early instilled into the mind, and incorporated into our habits of thinking, will generally flow a correspondent practice, marked by its respect for the laws of piety and virtue.

When, therefore, we consider the purity and excellence of the doctrines and precepts of the christian religion, compared with the absurdities, and too often the impurities, of the systems of paganism: the constancy and solemnity of her public and private instructions, commencing with that early period when the church receives her spiritual children by the sacred rite of baptism, and continued through the whole of life, compared with the total defect of moral culture in the heathen temples: the grandeur and efficacy of the motives with which she enforces her precepts, drawn, not only from every rational consideration of the interest and pleasure of a virtuous life, but from the supreme tribunal, and the retributions of eternity,

compared with the ridiculous fables of Elysium and Tartarus, or the mummeries of a heathen festival; will not the conclusion force itself upon the reflecting mind, antecedently to any minute and critical comparison of pagan with christian manners, that the gospel must have introduced into society, and into that portion of it, especially, which was formerly thought unworthy, or incapable of instruction, a most important amelioration of the general morals? Certainly, no religious system ever possessed such advantages for cultivating the heart, and improving the virtuous principles and habits of mankind. True it is, that where the sphere of operation of a moral system is not confined to a few selected disciples, but is extended to embrace the entire mass of human nature in any country, it must, in very many examples, seem to be fruitless and inefficient. Many persons there will be in whom untoward inclinations, violent passions, temptations of interest, or of pleasure, positions, or connexions in society unfavourable to virtue, will control the effect of the best principles, and often of the best original habits; but, on the great body of the people, trained under such a culture, it will always exert a powerful, extensive, and benignant influence.

The second observation is, that from a few prominent facts, or features in the public manners, an estimate of the general spirit which pervades society may often be formed with a considerable degree of truth and certainty, although, from distance of time, or the defect of historical materials, we should not be able to enter into a minute comparison of the private manners, and moral habits of one period, with those of another. When, therefore, we see inhuman or immoral customs laid aside, and such as are humane and benevolent, the natural fruits and indications of virtuous feeling, introduced in their room, they afford sufficient grounds on which to infer the general amelioration of the practical principles of that age or nation, in which so beneficial a change has taken place. Let us apply these remarks to some of the great features of modern manners which may justly be ascribed to the prevalence of the doctrines of christianity. It has been observed by all writers on this subject, that war, which unhappily, the corruption of human nature leaves us little ground to hope will ever be entirely extinguished between nations, has been greatly mitigated in the ferocity of its spirit, and in the inhuman cruelty with which its pretended rights were anciently exercised. The victor believed that, by the right of

conquest, he possessed an absolute control over the lives and persons of his enemies, so that he had only to deliberate with himself whether he should exterminate them, or reduce them to indiscriminate slavery. Christianity has taught him that a vanquished enemy is still a brother; and that conquest confers no legitimate powers but such as result from the necessity of selfpreservation, and from compassion to those who have yielded to his mercy. The barbarous rights of murder, and of slavery it has extinguished.* The gospel has, in like manner, put an end to the cruel and unnatural practice of exposing children, permitted by the laws of many ancient states, when they were deformed, or weakly, or likely to become a burden on the poverty of their parents; and no less frequently, perhaps, when they proved a restraint upon their pleasures. With the same spirit of humanity did it, as soon as it took possession of the

* There was something horrible in the principles of the most refined and polished nations of antiquity on this subject. They put no limits to the right of enslaving a conquered people; and prescribed no restraints to the abuse of power. Masters at Rome and Sparta might, at the impulse of their own pride or caprice, immolate their slaves to their vengeance, or their pleasure. Even Cato, that model of Roman virtue, lays it down as a maxim of rural economy, that old and useless slaves should be sold or destroyed. Those which he could not part with to advantage, he ordered to be cast into his fishponds.

Roman empire; suppress the barbarous combats of gladiators, in which thousands of these unhappy victims, often worthy the noblest employments in arms, were sacrificed every year, and often every month, merely to popular amusement. If christianity has restrained the barbarity of many heathen customs, it has opposed a check not less useful to the impurity and licentiousness of others. Polygamy, and incestuous connexions, allowed by the laws of many countries in the East, it suppressed among its own *disciples* from the beginning, and eventually abolished in every *nation* in which it obtained the ascendancy. And a most salutary restraint it has imposed on the capriciousness of divorce, which was almost every where in the ancient world, carried to a cruel and tyrannical extent, involving the most iniquitous oppression of the weaker sex, and, at the same time, corrupting the primary fountain of good morals in society, which consists in the order, purity, and harmony of families. The impurities of the religious rites of heathenism, not only allowed in their temples, but, in some nations, commanded by their laws,* are not now suffered to exist wherever chris-

* Particularly by the laws of the Babylonians, according to Herodotus, which required of every woman a sacrifice of her honour to some stranger, once in her life, in order to appease their pro-

tianity has extended her spiritual worship. And those *unnatural* crimes, so common in the manners of Greece and Rome, and which had the sanction of the example of philosophers themselves, are branded among christians with the greatest infamy. But one of the most characteristic distinctions of the spirit of christianity, and one of its most distinguished honours appears in the numerous establishments which are formed in all christian nations for the relief of poverty, of sickness, and all those calamities which afflict the most miserable and indigent portion of our species. Establishments which appear to have been utterly unknown to antiquity; but which naturally spring out of the bosom of that charity with which our blessed Saviour commands his disciples to embrace all men, and which forms the predominant character of his amiable religion.

In all these conspicuous points which I have just exhibited to you, and in many others which might be named, we discern the purity, the humanity, and benevolence of the evangelic spirit. But fixing these great points in the public manners, opens the way to

fligate goddess Mylitta: and by the customs of the Phenicians, in the worship of Adonis, in which the sacrifice of their virtue, or their hair was required; and the price of the former was deposited in the treasury of the temple.

a further, and important inference, which is, that they indicate a radical and universal change and amelioration of the spirit and morals of the great body of the people in all those nations which have embraced the gospel. When institutions and customs that have formed the national character and manners, and have become incorporated with all their habits, their interests, their religious prejudices, and even their amusements, suffer so important a change, it exhibits one of the most unequivocal proofs that the moral principles of the people have undergone an entire revolution; a revolution, in the present case, evidently in favour of virtue. From this train of reflections and of facts results a clear and decisive evidence of the holy and ameliorating influence of the gospel on the hearts and manners of mankind, wherever it has been received. And, as a secondary consequence, there arises a new presumptive argument of its divine origin, in proportion as its effects appear to be worthy of such a source.

But however fairly the preceding conclusion seems to be drawn, the fact of the amelioration of the morals of the christian world, has, by several writers, been strenuously denied. History, it is said, presents to us the same scenes of ambition, of intrigue, of treachery, of wars, and the various calamities which spring

from the disorders of the human passions, in those countries which are called christian, which, to the reproach of human nature, have existed in all nations from the beginning of time.

A judicious writer* has remarked with his usual correctness, that the records of history seldom are the place to look for the influence of religion. Her province is to point out the revolutions of nations, the march and conflicts of armies, those great and daring crimes which attend intrigues, and contests for power, or those base passions which display themselves amidst the wealth and luxury and cabals of courts. But of the tranquil and uniform train of private life, of the ordinary avocations and transactions of men, of their domestic and social relations, and the spirit which regulates and governs these, and of their devotional exercises: of this immense theatre of human duties over which religion exerts its supreme influence, it hardly ever enters into the plan of history to take any notice. Into those recesses of the heart in which religion chiefly reigns, confirming the purposes of piety and virtue, tranquilizing the passions, and administering consolations which the frailties and trials of this mortal state so much require, history never extends her inspection.

* Dr. Paley. Evid. part iii. ch. 7.

It usually represents human nature, therefore, only on the scene of its greatest corruption, where it must be always nearly the same, where the force and variety of temptation are calculated to intoxicate the heart, and overbear the calm considerations of virtue and religion; where indeed religion, in the chaos of the passions, is commonly either disbelieved or forgotten. Notwithstanding the pictures, then, which history presents to us of the vices of courts and camps, and the crimes of ambition, the conclusion remains unimpaired which we have before drawn, concerning the great moral reform which christianity hath produced in the world.

But the enemies of the gospel, not contented with denying those good effects of which it has evidently been the occasion, have imputed to it many positive evils. It has given rise, they say, to persecution for conscience' sake, and to wars more ferocious and cruel in their nature than those which have sprung from any other cause. Christianity, indeed, has often been the victim of persecution; and, in the depth of the hypocrisy of courts and courtiers, it has often been made the pretence both for persecution, and for war. But have they been real christians, or genuine believers in the great and adorable Author of our holy religion, who have ever excited the flames of

war, or conducted the vengeance of persecution, against the sacred rights of conscience? Examine the gospel. Nothing can be more abhorrent from its benevolent spirit than the rancor of persecution employed to subdue the assent of men even to the most important truths, or the exercise of violence in order to propagate the most sacred doctrines. It breathes only charity and good will to all mankind. And our blessed Saviour repeatedly declares *that his kingdom is not of this world*. A few mistaken zealots have, indeed, arisen at different periods, who have confounded their own theological opinions with the infallible truths of heaven, and so connected them, in their imagination, with the salvation of mankind, that, out of false charity, they have endeavoured to compel the consciences of their fellow christians to submit to an ostensible uniformity in their creed, and in the external rites of the public worship. These examples, however, of well meaning but pernicious zeal have been rare, and have proceeded, not from the spirit of religion, but from an unhappy error of judgment concerning the best means of promoting the charitable ends aimed at by mistaken piety. Yet, seldom has persecution had an origin which would admit of this palliation. The genuine causes of almost all persecutions, and of all the wars which have had

religion for their pretext, except those which have been merely defensive, have been the same from which all other wars, and the most afflicting disorders of the world in every age have arisen: the passions of proud and ambitious men, whether princes, or priests, sometimes endeavouring to preserve a tottering influence, sometimes to extend an unjust power, and, often enraged at not finding implicit and universal submission to their opinions and their will. They have hypocritically endeavoured to inlist public prejudice in their favour by their religious pretences, when they were only pursuing their own pernicious and interested designs. Such is the infirmity, or the pride of human nature, that strong passions, and strong persuasions of truth, whether in religion, philosophy, or civil policy, are prone, unless restrained by the meekness of piety, to compel all minds to assume the same tone, and profess the same convictions. Have we not accordingly seen, in the late revolutions in France, philosophy, who, while she was under restraint, was eternally boasting of the tolerance and liberality of her spirit, the moment that she became possessed of power, more intolerant than fanaticism, and philosophers destroying each other with more than the rage of bigots? Have we not seen political parties more sanguinary and ex-

terminating than armies of enthusiasts? If, therefore, we search for the genuine causes of the persecutions which have been kindled, or the wars which have been waged in the name of religion, we shall find them, not in the spirit of christianity, but, commonly, in the corrupted, ambitious, and violent passions of the human heart; which assume the holy mantle and vizard of religion, only the more securely to cover their criminal and hypocritical designs. Hence it appears how unjust are those clamors which have been raised against christianity by the unreflecting folly, or insidious malignity of its enemies, as if it were the secret nurse of the most cruel and vengeful dispositions of the soul, or had been the wicked and foolish author of persecutions which spent their fury only against itself.

Objections of inferior moment I trust it is unnecessary for your satisfaction, to attempt to resolve. There is one, however, which is more frequently urged, and more ambitiously displayed than others, to which it may be proper to direct your attention, and with a brief examination of which I shall conclude these lectures. If God, it is asked, should, on account of the weakness of human reason, or the defects of the lights of nature, deem it necessary to make any supernatural communication of his will to the world, is it not reasonable to expect from the

divine wisdom and goodness, that that communication should be coextensive with its necessity, or its importance to the happiness of mankind? And is it not equally reasonable to expect that the evidences of its truth should be plain and palpable to every grade of understanding, and not require to our conviction, as they now do, extensive and critical research, with a nice and accurate balancing of the weight of moral evidence, besides an immense accumulation of probable and presumptive proofs?

No exercise of human reason, perhaps, is in itself more unwarrantable, or more liable to error, than that with which we too often presume, from our own narrow views, to judge of what may reasonably be expected from the wisdom or goodness of God in the government of the universe. The whole system of nature, and the whole order of providence, which we perceive to be so different, in almost all their arrangements, from the plans which our wisdom, or our wishes would have prescribed, ought to teach us great caution and reserve in pronouncing any opinion concerning the operations of the infinite and incomprehensible Mind, except so far as the actual state of the world indicates his will. When this is clearly pointed out, the dictate of reason and of duty is, on our part, entire acquiescence in the

rectitude of the ordination, whether we understand the reasons on which it is founded or not, and implicit submission of heart to his *sovereignty*: that is, to a *wisdom*, the views and plans of which are often far above the reach of our feeble and narrow intellect. Let me apply these reflections to an obvious case analogous to that which is the ground of this objection. Can we assign a reason why the human mind, which is certainly susceptible of very high and noble improvements, should, in some portions of the earth, be left, without any means of instruction, or any motives to exertion, to sink into a state of ignorance and torpor, little, if at all, to be preferred to that in which the inferior animals exist? If improvements in science, and the arts of civilization contribute to the happiness of mankind, and assist them both in comprehending and fulfilling the extensive obligations of human duty, why has the order of providence been so arranged as to call forth and to favour the exertions of some nations, while others are left to languish under a darkness which almost entirely conceals from them even the existence of God? We frankly confess our ignorance on this subject. Ought we then to feel any more reluctance in submitting to the sovereignty of that infinite wisdom

which has hitherto confined the chief blessings* of the christian revelation to comparatively narrow limits? May it not, like other advantages of science, and civilization, be, at present, only in a state of progression, although it be destined, at length, to extend the consolations of its mercy, along with the knowledge of its truth, to every region of the globe? If then all events in the universe, whether belonging to the moral or physical order of things, are equally subject to the direction and control of divine providence, and if, in the limited extension of the christian religion, no greater difficulties are presented to our reason, than occur in the partial distribution of the means of the moral and intellectual culture of nations, and of other blessings apparently of the greatest importance to human happiness, the objection is answered by the perfect analogy which this event bears to other dispensations and appointments of the infinite and sovereign Governor of the universe. This analogy deserves to be pursued farther. It may relieve the inquiring mind from the pressure of other difficulties intimately connected with the principle of this objection.

* I say its chief blessings, because, as I shall more particularly remark again, christianity extends its benefits, in many and most important views, to the whole human race.

The works of nature are acknowledged to contain a revelation of God to all rational minds capable of observing them; and, by those who object to the christian revelation its want of universality, they are said to contain the only manifestation of the divine will which has ever been made to mankind. But, is not this principle embarrassed by the same difficulty, which has been urged by these writers against the gospel? The volume of nature, indeed, presents itself to be read by every nation; but do we find all men capable of reading it, and deriving from it those clear and undeniable truths with regard to the nature and perfections of the Creator, the duties, and the hopes of man, which go to compose that body of doctrine which we have been pleased to call *the religion of nature*? The experience of all ages has demonstrated the impotence and errors of the human mind upon these subjects, not only in the great mass of mankind, but among the philosophers themselves; a few only of whom have been found who were able to make any approaches to the true knowledge of God, and the genuine principles of virtue and piety. And what is the difference as to moral effect, whether the revelation be not universal, or mankind be not universally capable of clearly understanding it, and collecting from it a perfect system of theological

and moral truth; that is, of those truths which exhibit to us in his proper character the object of our worship, and prescribe, in its just extent, the law of our duty? In the next place, although the works of nature, exhibit the most demonstrative evidence of the existence, the wisdom, the goodness, and almighty power of the Creator; yet, are there not, along with the clearest and sublimest demonstrations of these truths, presented to the weakness of our purblind reason, such apparent disorders and defects in the system as seem to impair the certainty of our conclusions, and afford occasion to many minds to deny the being of God, and to still a greater number to doubt of the government of a divine providence over the world? In both these dispensations, then, the *revelation of nature*, and the *evangelic revelation*, there appears such an obvious analogy as marks the impression of the same hand. In both you discern the most unequivocal characters of divine wisdom, and the most certain proofs of their divine origin; and both are accompanied with circumstances which it transcends the infirmity of our reason to explain, and which seem designed by God, at once, to invite and elude inquiry, and to exercise our pious submission to his inscrutable wisdom, and his sovereign will. While, therefore, these circumstances are not

acknowledged, in the one case, to impair the manifest proofs of the wisdom of God in the creation of the world, they ought not to be admitted in the other, to invalidate the irrefragable evidences, derived from so many sources, of the divine authority of the christian revelation.

But, if the *extraordinary revelation of the gospel* be designed to direct us to the most important ends of our being, and, at the same time, to supply the defects of that *natural revelation*, which is said to be so imperfect, why should any obscurity rest upon its evidence? Why should we be left to collect the proofs, which are the basis of our faith, by tedious and laborious research, and, often, to pursue them through a series of deductions which all men have not leisure to follow, and which cannot be attended with equal conviction to every mind?

It is not for us to know all the reasons on which God has established the order of the moral, more than of the physical world. One principle is certain, which is common to both: that the constitution of nature is so framed that the most valuable ends of our being are seldom to be attained by man, without strenuous exertion, and persevering application. This law appears to be necessary in order that the human faculties, by continual exercise, may attain their

highest vigor. Another principle in the constitution of our nature seems to be no less certain: that, in all moral investigations, especially, into subjects which most immediately relate to practical duty, no inconsiderable degrees of candor, fairness, and integrity of mind are requisite to the discovery of truth; which again, by a reflex action, is necessary to give the greatest extent and perfection to these, and to all the other virtues. Reason will hardly examine with perfect fairness those principles of duty, or enforce them with a rigorous sanction, to which all the tendencies of the heart are strongly opposed. But an honest mind, solicitous to understand the prescriptions of duty only in order to obey them, will perceive truth by a light which is too feeble to penetrate, and which will, therefore, be perverted or repelled by, a heart attached to its vices, and surrounded by the mists of sensual passions. Hence it has pleased God often to suffer obscure and doubtful circumstances to lie mingled with the most important truths, in order to be a test of the good and candid dispositions of the heart, and to call into vigorous action the best powers of the soul in their investigation. In a state of probation, such as that in which we are placed, the light which accompanies religion and virtue ought not to be so strong as to supersede the diligent and

faithful exercise of the faculties of our own minds, or the influence of the good dispositions of the heart in our search after truth. In conformity with this principle God hath shed on the laws of duty generally, and on the doctrines of religion in particular, that degree of clearness and evidence which is sufficient to satisfy the fair and upright inquirer, but which will, at the same time, leave to the dishonest an excuse for rejecting conclusions at war with their inclinations. That full and dazzling light on these subjects which shall be unmixed with any doubts is reserved, perhaps, as a reward of perfect virtue and piety in a higher state of existence. There is hardly a principle of the christian system which a truly good man would not most fervently wish to be true. But if, while his graces, and the habits of his holiness are yet only under discipline and cultivation, its evidences were so palpable and irresistible as to leave no room for discussion and inquiry, there could be no test of that candor of mind, that ardent desire of knowing the truth, that openness to conviction even against our own prepossessions and inclinations, in which much of the merit of faith consists. And it is well remarked by a judicious writer, that, if the objects of revelation, God in the awfulness of his majesty, the Saviour in his glory, the great tribunal

and the everlasting retributions of the righteous and the wicked, were displayed before mankind with that resplendent evidence which some men seem to demand, and which, indeed, the objection that I am considering, when pushed to its full extent, would require, the control upon the human faculties would be too powerful; the whole order of life would be inverted; and all the occupations of human industry would be arrested. The duties proper to this state of being would cease to be fulfilled, and eternity alone would occupy the thoughts and cares of mortals.

Suffer me now to conclude my answer to this objection, and, at the same time, to close these lectures with an observation which, while it is intimately related to the subject of which I have just been treating, is of importance also in order to a just view of the influence of the christian system on the general happiness of the world. Although the knowledge of its divine truths has not been actually communicated to all nations; yet it teaches us to believe that the whole human race do, in a very great degree, participate in its blessings. From the moment of the fall of our original parent, and the merciful promise of that heavenly *Seed* who, from the beginning was destined to repair the evils of his transgression, the world has been placed under an administration of grace in the

hands of the Mediator, suited to its degenerate condition. And now, in consequence of the atonement made by *the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*, and of the assistance of the holy Spirit, which through *the one oblation offered on the cross*, has been imparted to all men to direct and strengthen the dictates of conscience in their breasts, salvation has been rendered possible to sincere repentance, and regeneration of heart, in every age, and in every nation, even where the name of Jesus Christ has not been explicitly revealed.* For the holy apostle Peter hath taught us, what a heavenly vision revealed to

* The pious men in the patriarchal ages, and generally in the ancient world, could have had no definite, and evangelical apprehensions of the character of the Saviour, notwithstanding it was through the efficacy of his atonement that they had access to God, and by his Spirit they were sanctified. The same Spirit is imparted, in a degree, to the heathen world, in every age, who, applying with a divine efficacy the law of nature to the consciences of men, becomes, to many among them, a principle of sincere repentance and regeneration of heart.

The revd. Mr. Brainerd in the journal of his mission among the Indians, relates a striking anecdote, very much to the present point, of an aged man whom he met with, who, in his original state of heathenism, had gained, from his own reflections, and the exercises of his own heart, under the influence of that divine Spirit which he acknowledged, an acquaintance with the most important practical principles of real piety, as far, probably, as, without the explicit knowledge of the Mediator, and the atonement, they were generally attained even by the best men in the ancient and patriarchal world. Mr. Brainerd, after free and repeated conversations with him on the most practical subjects

him: that, through the death and mediation of the ever blessed Saviour, *in every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.*

This is the foundation of our hope with regard to the pious men of the ancient world: and on the same grounds may we still build a reasonable hope, that those distant corners of the earth, which seem covered with the profoundest darkness, preserve, at all times, many of the chosen vessels of mercy. And, although the sun of righteousness has not yet lifted his beams on all nations, we have reason to believe that he is in his glorious progress; and that as the

of religion, declares that if he thought it possible for a heathen to be a truly pious man, without the direct knowledge of Jesus Christ, he would have concluded this Indian to be such. In this remark, indeed, we perceive a certain illiberality of opinion, which, considering the powerful effect, on many minds, of the prejudices of education, is, perhaps, rather to be lamented than severely censured. This pious missionary forgot the reasoning of saint Paul in the third chapter of his epistle to the Romans.

Will it be asked, what advantages then, if the principle which has been stated above be just, have the christian nations over those who enjoy only the faint glimmerings of the light of nature? I answer, that, although men, who enjoy only the imperfect lights of nature, together with those gleams of original truth which have been preserved by a tradition that is not yet entirely extinct among any people, may, through repentance and sanctification of the Spirit, be saved by a Redeemer whom they have not distinctly known, yet must they be subject, through life, to many, and distressing doubts and anxieties which the native weakness of human reason is unable to resolve. Besides, the

plans of divine providence are hastening to their full development, the gospel will shortly be extended, along with the improvements of civilization and science, over the whole earth, and involve all nations in the splendor of his rays. When this blessed era shall arrive, shall we not find an abundant compensation for the partial darkness, or the feeble dawn, which has so long overspread the world, not only in the superior duration, but in the superior glory of that period, when, to use the beautiful and expressive figure of the prophet, *the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days.*

nations who enjoy the blessed light of the gospel possess much clearer and more ample means of knowledge and of grace, more efficient motives of duty, more consoling hopes, than those who are left to the obscure teachings of reason unenlightened by revelation. And, if such means and motives have in their own nature, and independently on the more abundant influences of the divine Spirit, which accompany them under the christian dispensation, a powerful tendency to promote the spirit, and advance the interests of piety and virtue, how greatly must the numbers of pious men be multiplied under the full illumination of the Sun of righteousness?

To these reflections it may be added, that if higher degrees of purity, and sanctity of heart and life be the natural result of the clearer lights, and nobler privileges of the gospel, a principle most reasonable in itself, will it not follow likewise, that proportionably richer and more glorious rewards shall crown the obedience of the sincere christian in the everlasting presence of his Redeemer?

APPENDIX TO LECTURE VIII.

OF DEMONIACAL POSSESSIONS.

THE case of demoniacal possessions, which so frequently occurs in our translation of the gospels, seems to form an important objection to some of the principles laid down in the eighth lecture; and, certainly, according to the ideas commonly entertained of them, would form a most singular phenomenon in the history of human evils. I am aware of the hazard of controverting a common opinion which has, in any degree, been connected, and, in many minds, almost identified, with the belief of religion. But, having endeavoured to establish certain principles concerning all miraculous interference with the fixed order of nature, which I deem essential to the evidences of revelation, I am constrained to take some notice of an opinion which seems to undermine the ground on which the weight of the argument rests. I very unwillingly oppose the sentiments of so many wise and good men, although supported by the opinions of others equally good and wise: and if they could make a clear and satisfactory distinction between *the powers of possession*, and the *powers of miracles*, I would cheerfully avoid all consideration of the present question, and yield my judgment to theirs. I fear not to adopt any principle which, on full examination, shall be proved to be clearly, and explicitly taught by the divine Author of our holy religion. I would not suffer the weakness of my reason, in things above its reach, to oppose an objection to his positive authority. But I believe that, on due inquiry, the case of these supposed possessions will not be found to come under this description.

Demoniacal possessions are, by the most judicious advocates for them, admitted to be a singular interference of diabolical power with the order of providence, and the safety and happiness of man, limited, in a great measure, to the age of the evan-

gelic history, or, at the utmost, to a short space of time before and after that period. That Satan should, at that particular season, be let loose to vex mankind in so extraordinary a way appears to be a strange, and unaccountable dispensation of divine providence;* and, if the case were new, as it is supposed to be, it seems no less strange that the Jews of that age should express no surprise at it, but, on the other hand, should speak of these maladies, which are called possessions, as of ordinary events with which they were familiar. They had, like other disorders of the mind or body, their appropriate denominations; and there were known professors of the art of curing them.† I, therefore, entirely adopt the opinion of the very learned and pious Joseph Mede, whom I have before mentioned, who considers them as diseases, chiefly of the melancholic, phrenetic, and epileptic kinds. They are ranked in the catalogue of diseases cured by Christ indiscriminately with other maladies. A remarkable example of this occurs in the fourth chapter of St. Matthew's gospel, the first place in which the case is mentioned in the evangelic history: *And they brought to him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those which had the palsy, and he healed them.*‡ In this passage, palsy, lunacy, and what has since been called *possession*, are placed, without any distinction of natural, and supernatural disorders, under the general head of divers diseases and torments. But the truth is, there is not a word in the original which signifies either *possession*, or *devils*; and I must call your attention to this as one example, out of several which we unhappily have occasion to notice, of the influ-

* I shall endeavour afterwards to show that these cases of distressing or terrifying malady, which I suppose to be included under the head of possession or demoniacity, were not more frequent in that age, than they are in ours, and, perhaps, have been at all times.

† A mongrel kind of artists; something between jugglers, or conjurers, and physicians, called exorcists; such as are often found in every country playing upon the credulity of the ignorant.

‡ Matthew iv. 24.

ence of preconceived opinions on the minds of even great and good men, in giving a tincture, in certain cases, to our excellent version of the scriptures. Let me produce the entire passage as it stands in the original Greek: καὶ προσήνεγκαν αὐτῷ πάντας τὰς κακῶς ἔχοντας ποικίλαις νόσοις, καὶ βασάνοις συνεχομένοις, καὶ δαιμονιζομένοις, καὶ σεληνιαζομένοις, καὶ παραλυτικοίς. The following is the literal translation of the passage into English: *And they brought to him all who were afflicted with various diseases, even [καὶ exegetical, or such as] persons suffering under excruciating torments, and demoniacs, and lunatics, and paralytics.* Δαιμονιζομένοι and σεληνιαζομένοι are words precisely of the same structure, and growing out of the same form of derivation; so that if one should signify *possessed* by demons, [not devils, for the two terms convey entirely different ideas] the other should be translated *possessed* with the moon. The absurdity of this version would be immediately perceived. There is, however, another and related phrase, *moon-struck*, which is often used without any sense of impropriety, when that planet, in popular opinion, has been regarded as the cause of the disease. To understand the genuine meaning then of the terms δαιμονιζομένοι καὶ σεληνιαζομένοι in the Greek language, let us examine some terms of similar structure and derivation in the Latin tongue, with which, perhaps, we are better acquainted. *Ceriti*, or *oeriti*, and *larvati* were terms expressive of persons affected with melancholy or madness, involving in their derivation the supposed causes of the disorders, the former being derived from *Ceres*, one of their rural deities, the latter from *larvæ*, a kind of malignant imps with horrid visages,* which, they imagined, inhabited dark and solitary places. *Ceriti*, then, signifies *Ceres-struck*, or smitten with madness by their goddess *Ceres*, by means of some fearful impressions made by her upon the imagination of the patient; and *larvati* signifies persons frightened out of the proper exercise of their reason by direful images presented to their senses, or their fancy, by these horrible goblins. A Greek or Roman never thought of the actual pos-

* *Larva* properly signifies a mask; and the imps or goblins expressed by the same word in the plural number, were supposed to have frightful countenances resembling masks painted with the most hideous figures.

session of the bodies of these maniacs by the *larvæ*, or by Ceres, more than by the moon; but, unacquainted with the powers of a disordered imagination, created by a disordered body; knowing little of the real philosophy of the human body and mind, they were unable to account for the frightful impressions often made on the minds of melancholy and mad persons, without employing the agency of these wicked and hideous deities, or goblins, who were supposed to be indued with the power of presenting themselves, in direful shapes to the senses of the diseased, and thus depriving them of their reason.

The way is now opened to explain the true origin of all such terms expressive of disorders incident to human nature. In every nation, before natural science has yet arrived at any perfection, we find their forests, mountains, and even the atmosphere, filled with imaginary supernatural spirits, or demons, often of a tricky and mischievous character, such as the *larvæ*, and many of the rural deities of the Greeks and Romans, the imps, elves, and fairies of our forefathers in Great Britain. When the true causes of certain frightful diseases, such as epilepsy, madness, and melancholy, were not known, an ignorant people were prone to ascribe them to some malignant influence of these imaginary beings; and they gave them names accordingly. The names, being once appropriated to the disorders, were still retained even after a juster philosophy had demonstrated the absurdity of the causes to which popular ignorance had ascribed them; and wise men and sages spoke as familiarly as the vulgar, of the *goblin*, or *mask-struck*, *Ceres-struck*, or *demon-struck*, or as we do of the *lunatic* or *moonstruck*, meaning only *melancholy* or *insane* persons.

It may be thought inconsistent with this interpretation of the term *demoniac*, which has been, by the mistake of good men, translated *possessed with devils*, that our Saviour is often made to address the impure spirit, and to command it to come out of the unhappy sufferer; clearly distinguishing, in the form of expression, between the person, and that spiritual power, whatever it was, by which he was actuated. I answer, that many of the idioms of particular languages, and many forms of phrase in all languages, are necessarily influenced by popular and prevalent ideas, which obtained in the early periods of society, and when language was yet in its forming state; and it suffers material changes from any general and popular opinions which may after-

wards, at any period, be introduced into a nation.* Idioms are incorporated into a tongue which are not easily altered by the improvements of philosophy. We say familiarly the sun rises and sets, advances or recedes in the ecliptic. We speak of magicians, soothsayers, and witchcraft, although we believe in no other art which these persons possess but that of imposture, and in no other power but that which they acquire from popular credulity. And the custom of speaking to and of demons the supposed authors of lunacy, and other diseases of a similar nature, rather than of the diseases themselves, probably arose among the Jews when they adopted many superstitions of the neighbouring pagans along with the Greek language, which had become, at least for the transaction of all ordinary affairs, almost the universal language of the East. To confirm these reflections, and to show that rebuking, and commanding a pretended demon spirit to depart from a lunatic, or other disordered person, was equivalent to rebuking and extirpating the disease, we have a striking example in the history of St. Paul's first visit to the city of Philippi.† The apostle and his company were followed several days by a damsel, who, in the language of our version, was possessed by a *spirit of divination*. This rendering, however, disguises, in some degree, the fact. In the original it is a *spirit of Python or Apollo*. Apollo was that imaginary being who, according to the mythology of the Greeks, was the god of soothsaying and oracles. And those impostors who pretended, or insane persons who imagined themselves to be possessed of a prophetic afflatus, or a gift of fortunetelling, were said to have a *spirit of Python*. And the phrase conveyed to the mind of a sensible Greek the idea merely of a crazy, or knavish impulse to give forth oracles, or auguries, or to announce their fortunes to credulous applicants. It was, probably, this last part of the character of this pythoness which enabled her to bring so great gain to her masters. Now the apostle, most assuredly, did not believe in any such being as

* Many examples of this might be produced from the English language during the period of the commonwealth in England; and many others of a very contrary nature in the French language during the late turbulent revolution.

† Acts of the Apostles, ch. xvi. v. 16—18.

Apollo, nor in any prophetic or divining spirit imparted by him to this maid. But she was troublesome, crying after him and his companions, (as is frequently the case with crazed, silly, or intoxicated persons,) to their great annoyance, and probably in a manner that would appear ridiculous and degrading to these good men, in the eyes of surrounding strangers.* The apostle, although, as I have said before, he could have no belief in Apollo, or in any prophetic spirit imparted to this maid by the imaginary god; yet in the ordinary idiom employed on such occasions, *commanded the spirit to come out of her*. Considering, then, the circumstances of this case, is it possible to conceive that the command given by the apostle ought to be viewed in any other light than as a divine and authoritative injunction to the disease to cease, to the idiotism, or melancholy to leave her: or, if she were an impostor, it was a command which delivered her from that spirit of wickedness.†

* This is not an unnatural supposition; because it is not uncommon for silly, deranged, or half intoxicated persons, to vociferate after men of the most respectable characters, what they have heard concerning them; and, in the same manner, to proclaim any pretensions which they are known to make. It appears to me to discover a strange and violent pertinacity in prejudice, in those who say that this pythoness damsel was constrained to utter a real prophecy on this occasion. That a diabolical spirit should urge her to proclaim that the apostles were *the servants of the most high God, showing to mankind the way of salvation*, is surely a most improbable supposition. That she should be actuated by the Spirit of God, or, if she were, that the apostle should command her to be silent, is not less improbable. To suppose that the divine Spirit, in this instance controlled the demon spirit constraining it to give testimony in favour of the apostle, and his companions, would be placing an inspiration of heaven among the ravings of a delirious pythoness, the contempt of all the wise among the heathens themselves, the object of the idle curiosity, or superstitious wonder of the vulgar.

† In employing this phrase, *a spirit of wickedness*, no person supposes that any thing more is meant than her own spirit under a wicked direction. And may not *a spirit of divination* mean no

It has been alleged as an additional proof of the actual possession of the bodies of men by evil spirits, that, in several instances, they confessed it, in others, they addressed, questioned, answered, or asked favours of Christ in their own proper character as wicked and infernal inhabitants of the persons of the insane. One says *his name is legion, because, says he, we are many*. As such, he asks, *art thou come to torment us before the time?* and then *entreats permission that they may be suffered to enter into a herd of swine*. In order to explain these appearances as distinctly as possible, agreeably to the principles which I have already laid down, and endeavoured to defend, let me remark, that it is not uncommon, where a belief in the powers of enchantment and witchcraft, for example, has become prevalent and popular, for weak and credulous persons to imagine themselves to be under the dominion and control of certain spirits obedient to the mandate of some infamous impostors, the professors of these diabolical arts. And often it has been observed that insane persons have been influenced in their imaginations concerning themselves by certain general and popular opinions. Among the ancient pagans it was a common case for the pythonesses in their raving fits, to imagine that they were agitated to fury by an afflatus from Apollo,

more than a constant and violent impulse, either through insanity, or imposture to uttering oracles, or foretelling fortunes? And are not both these expressions, taken in this light, analogous to many others in the sacred writings, as *a foul spirit, an unclean spirit, an evil spirit*, which have been supposed to imply some diabolical agents inhabiting the bodies of men? And I may ask farther, would it be any strain of the idioms of language even as used among us, to address in the following style one whom you were either reprehending, or restoring to a right mind, if you had power, by a word to do so: "O thou spirit of malice, uncleanness, wickedness! depart from this unhappy man that he may become a true penitent." If he were restored, would it be any violence to the idioms of our language, or the ideas of our age, to say, the foul, the evil, the mischievous spirit has left him? So says the prophet Zechariah: *and it shall come to pass in that day he shall cause the UNCLEAN SPIRIT to pass out of the land*. Zech. xiii. 2.

or pressed under the weight of the incumbent god. There were many mad persons who thought they were driven in their frantic excesses by Pan, by Bacchus, by Ceres, or by some other of their imaginary deities. No insane persons entertain the same imaginations now, because the same opinions no longer exist among the people. But not a few have supposed themselves to be agitated and tormented by devils. Some have believed that they were divine agents, or missionaries from heaven to teach mankind the will of God. Others have even conceived themselves to be the *Paraclete* spoken of by St. John, the *Comforter*, the *Holy-ghost* promised by the Saviour to his church. And all these maniacs have acted under the full persuasion of the truth of their several impressions; and have spoken in the name of the respective spirits which they supposed to be in them. It is not an unreasonable supposition, therefore, that the demoniacs in our Saviour's time, when the opinion of demoniacal agency was prevalent, would often speak and act as if conscious of being possessed, and in the manner they supposed the demon himself would in that case speak and act. And certainly every sentence uttered by him who called himself legion very much resembles the raving of an insane man. And if Christ replies to him in the same style in which we have heard Paul addressing the damsel possessed of the spirit of Python, may it not reasonably be interpreted on the same principles.*

* This furious madman addressing Christ in the name of his legion, (for it is plain from the narration that it was the man himself who spoke, and not any spirit from within him) asks leave for them to pass into a neighbouring herd of swine. The madness instantly seized upon the swine and they all rushed into the sea and perished. In madmen we often perceive a peculiar archness, and cunning in the midst of their most disordered and extravagant conceptions. This maniac asked, in the name of the spirits which, he supposed, possessed him, permission to go into the herd which was feeding in his sight, perhaps from some idea of the amusement such a scene would afford; or, possibly, from the expectation of exciting the resentment of the owners of those animals against Christ, who might thereby be induced to expel him from their territory. Our Saviour, however, fearless of consequences, transferred the disease to the filthy

But, without pursuing farther these explanatory details concerning the actions of demoniacs, or the miracles which were performed upon them, let me observe, as one source of error in our conceptions with regard to them arises from translating the terms *δαιμονες* and *δαιμονια*, by the English word *devils*, that these terms, in the New Testament, are never once used to designate the great power of moral evil, who has intercourse with our spirits to tempt them to sin, called in the language of the scriptures *διαβολος*, and, in English, expressed by the words the devil, or Satan.* They are, as you have seen before, only certain imaginary beings, the creation of the superstitious fancy of the pagans, the belief of which was afterwards introduced from them along with other superstitions, among the Jews. Originally they were supposed to be the spirits of dead men, illustrious heroes, or venerable ancestors, raised to the rank of demigods, or intercessors between the great gods of nature, and the human race.†

herd as a just punishment on the impious and faithless proprietors who, in defiance to the laws of Moses, kept these odious and prohibited animals in the land of Israel.

* The only passage in which these demon powers seem to bear any analogy to that evil spirit whom we denominate Satan or the devil, is in the 12th chapter of the gospel of St. Matthew, 25th and 26th verses. When our Saviour had cured an unhappy man who had been both blind and dumb, which disorders also were ascribed to demoniac influence, the pharisees, when they heard of it, said; *he doth not cast out devils but by Beelzebub the prince of devils*; but Jesus answered them: *every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and if Satan cast out Satan he is divided against himself, how then shall his kingdom stand?* It is evident, however, that Christ, in this reply, does not acknowledge Satan as the author of those diseases which he had just healed. All that he here intends is to show, on their own principles, the futility of their objection, and the falsehood of their argument.

† In this sense precisely the apostle Paul uses the term *δαιμονια*, 1 Tim. iv. 1. predicting the apostasy of christians, and describing the saint worship of the Romish church. *Many, saith he, shall apostatize from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of "devils."* Devils is interposed by our translators. The

At length, the term demons was extended to embrace all those imaginary beings either of a light and sportive, or of a malignant and mischievous character, which superstition at any time begot on ignorance.

If, then, the ideas which have been given of demons, and their powers, be just, and we have seen that they are clearly supported by the general strain of the scriptures, as well as by the most judicious Greek writers, the question of demoniacal possession is decided at once. It is not to be believed that our blessed Saviour, or the holy apostles, should ascribe such tremendous powers over the minds and bodies of men as were exhibited in the cases of demoniacs, to fictitious beings, the mere creations of a superstitious imagination. I do not, however, condemn those who believe in possessions. I know how difficult it is in certain minds, and often in the most ingenious, to free themselves from the influence of early impression, or to surmount the prejudices of early education. And I confess there is a real difficulty, in some instances, in accommodating the language of the evangelic narrative as it is presented to us, with the truth of things as it is exhibited throughout the rest of the sacred writings. Idioms had been introduced at this time into the language of the Jews, along with the introduction of foreign superstitions, which bear the appearance of acknowledging the actual possession of the bodies of men by evil spirits. But I presume principles have been already laid down which will furnish a reasonable interpretation to most, if not all, of these expressions, without admitting the interference of demoniacal powers with the order and government of divine providence. If the writers who contend for these dreadful powers of evil spirits over the bodily and mental diseases of men, can separate the case of possessions from that of real miracles, I have already said, I have no controversy with them on the subject: but miracles, I must still insist, are exclusively the seal of God by which he confirms the mission of those

literal version is *doctrines concerning demons*, that is, doctrines teaching the necessity of certain intercessory spirits between God, and man, such as the spirits of canonized saints, who were, under this view, to become themselves objects of popular worship.

holy men through whose ministry he reveals his will to the world: a seal which he never adds to error and falsehood; a seal which he never puts into the hands of the *father of lies*.

I think it of importance, however, to caution you against supposing that the denial of demoniacal possessions does, in any degree, impair the scripture doctrine of the existence and agency of that prince of evil spirits, called the devil and Satan, who often has access to our spirits, in a way that we do not understand, to suggest the thoughts and purposes of sin. This influence is wholly of a spiritual kind, and gives no disturbance to the established order of nature. The agency of this spirit, indeed, and of his subordinate instruments has become so blended, since the fall, with the fixed course of providence, and the natural operation of the human mind as, in general, not to be clearly distinguished from them. One consequence, however, injurious to practical piety too frequently arises from an injudicious application of this doctrine; when the sinner, instead of humbly, penitently, and fully acknowledging his own depravity, and corruption, and the evil of his own manifold offences against the law of God, attempts to divide the guilt with the tempter, or the temptation. Against this most dangerous practical error a real christian cannot too sedulously guard.

Before concluding this appendix permit me to obviate a remark which is sometimes made by writers, equally respectable for their sound judgment and sincere piety. About the period of our Lord's ministry, they say, these terrible and unusual disorders which have been called *possessions* had an extent, a violence, and frequency, which, as far as appears from history, they never had in any other age. Hence they conclude that *the possessions* must have been real, and that it pleased God to permit the devil to rage, at that time, with peculiar malignity, not only for the punishment of the Jewish nation, now drawing near to its final destruction, but, what is more strange, for the demonstration of the divine mission of our blessed Saviour* by those numerous miracles by which he ejected this prince of evil spirits from the miserable victims of his power; as if there were not subjects

* Whitby after Lightfoot, comment. on Mat. iv. 24. Bishop orteus, lect. 10th.

enough in nature on which he could display his omnipotence, nor miseries enough in human life on which he could exert his benignity! On the other hand, there is sufficient reason to believe that these grievous afflictions were not more common in the period chosen by these writers for the display of demoniacal powers, than they are in our own age, or than they are in any age, in proportion to the population of countries, and the corruption of society and manners.* That they are not now so *visible*, is owing to the benevolent genius of christianity, which has every where erected receptacles of human misery, of various kinds, at once to relieve it, and to cover it from public view. If all those charitable institutions, of which there was no resemblance in antiquity, were to disgorge at once their contents on society; if the wretched objects which fill the cells of our hospitals were to meet our view at the corners of all our streets; if the causes of these most direful calamities which afflict our nature were as little known to the mass of our population as to the populace of Jerusalem and Galilee; and if the same superstitious notions now prevailed among us which, but a little more than a century ago, disturbed society both in Europe and America, relative to the powers of witchcraft, would we not hear of possessions, of the influences, and agency of certain demon spirits upon their ignorant and wretched subjects, as frequently as Josephus informs us they were seen in his time, in the country of Judea?

* Corruption of manners, luxury, and profligacy, are known to aggravate, and multiply all disorders, and none more than paralysis, epilepsy, and madness.

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