A

CONCISE VIEW

OF THE

EVIDENCES AND CORRUPTIONS

OF CHRISTIANITY.

BY

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PREFACE.

HAVING in the early part of my life openly professed myself an unbeliever in Christianity, and endeavoured on all occasions to justify my dissent by argument, I conceive it to be a duty which I owe to myself, as well as to those whom I may have misled, to state publicly the reasons which have induced me to change my sentiments, and adopt that religion to which I formerly refused my assent.

From what I have experienced in myself and observed in others, I entertain no doubt that the strongest objections of unbelievers are applicable rather to the abuses and corruptions which have been introduced into Christianity by the misguided zeal or interested views of its professors, than to the genuine doctrines of Revelation: and if I were obliged to adopt the tenets which are considered by several church establishments as essential parts of their faith, my objections would be as strong as ever.

The Gospel is acknowledged by all Christians to be the standard of their faith and the rule of their con-

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duct: but the Bible cannot be swallowed at one gulp; and it is a truth which cannot be denied, that the great majority of Christians derive the first impressions of their religion, not from the Bible itself, but from the doctrines of the particular church under which they happen to be born. In Roman Catholic countries the first doctrines they are taught are Transubstantiation and the Adoration of the Host. Those who are born under the auspices of the Church of England are taught to believe in the Trinity and the Divinity of Christ, long before they are sufficiently acquainted with Scripture to deduce those tenets from that source; while the doctrine of Predestination is the favourite dogma of the Calvinists. Thus they become Roman Catholics, Church of England men, and Predestinarians, before they can be said to be really Christians. That they adopt the creed of their particular church rather than the doctrines of the Gospel, is manifest from this consideration, that ninety-nine in a hundred follow the doctrines of the sect in which they received the first impressions of their religion, which can proceed only from the influence of early instructions, by which they are led to confound the particular tenets of their church with those of Christianity itself; for as the minds of the Catholic and the Protestant do not materially differ

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in other respects, I can no otherwise account for the general and almost universal adherence of each to that mode of faith in which he has been brought up, than to the influence of the first impressions which they have imbibed in the first lessons they have received from their original instructors. The consequence is, that when, amidst the corruptions to which Christianity has at different times been exposed, any particular tenet appears so absurd and irreconcilable to common sense, that no rational man can admit it as an article of faith; yet, if it constitutes a doctrine of the sect in which the man who repudiates it has been brought up, he is very apt to abjure the religion which he imagines sanctions such absurdity, instead of examining whether it is really a doctrine of that religion, or a corruption of its purity adopted by that sect in which he has been brought up.

This is, perhaps, the most frequent cause of infidelity: few people have the leisure or inclination, and all have not the capacity to enter into such disquisitions; and, being taught to consider the tenets of their sect to be the genuine doctrines of Christianity, they make no distinction between them, and reject them both without any further consideration. This I am satisfied was my case, till, on further investigation, I found that those tenets which I could not

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admit were not the genuine doctrines of Christianity as contained in the Gospels, but the corruptions of the churches which, through ignorance or other motives, had imposed them on the world as articles of faith: and I found that I could dissent from the church without in the least impairing my faith in the real doctrines of Revelation.

Nearly the whole of the following observations, which I submit with much diffidence to the public, were written almost twenty years ago, and, as they were not intended for publication, I expressed my thoughts in very strong language. Some of the expressions have been softened, though, perhaps, there may still remain some which may appear harsh, and which, perhaps, might have been cast in a softer mould, had they been originally written for the press: at the same time I conceive, when an author combats what he believes to be gross abuses and corruptions in matters of the highest concern, it is no part of his duty to state them in soft language and honeyed phrases, but to place them in the strongest light, and expose them in their true colours.

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INTRODUCTION.

INFIDELITY is generally represented by theologians as having its exclusive source in the passions, vices, and immorality of its professors. This has been justly condemned as an arrogant and uncharitable conclusion. That many, hurried by the violence of their passions and a course of vice and profligacy, are tempted to renounce Christianity as a troublesome restraint on their criminal conduct, and have recourse to infidelity as a relief from the remorse and apprehensions with which a belief in the Gospel would disturb their vicious enjoyments, is a fact, I am afraid, too obvious to be denied. Others, from motives of vanity and a puerile affectation of shewing their superiority to the rest of mankind, are too apt to range themselves under the banner of infidelity, rather from an ambition of shewing their wit and displaying their talents for disputation, than from a thorough conviction; till, by their industry in search of arguments to establish their own doctrine and refute the reasoning of their opponents, they gradually confirm themselves in unbelief. But having granted this, it must be allowed, on the other

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hand, that many conscientious and well-meaning men have rejected Revelation, because, after what they conceived to be a fair and honest examination, they did not think the evidence on which it is founded sufficient to command their assent. Among these many undoubtedly are honest, worthy, and moral men, and, if their incredulity be a fault, it is a fault of the head, and not of the heart.

There is, however, reason to apprehend, that even where infidelity is not the offspring, it is in general the parent of immorality; for while men are actuated by motives, he who believes Christianity will, in the natural course of things, be a better man than he who rejects it; and for this plain reason, that the Christian has stronger motives to impel him to a virtuous and moral conduct than the unbeliever.

The corruption of genuine Christianity, in the several religious establishments of the Christian world, is, perhaps, one of the principal causes of infidelity. Few have either leisure, inclination, or ability, to study their religion at the fountain head, in the records of the New Testament itself: they, therefore, adopt the doctrines of the church in which they are born, as true and genuine Christianity; and as there are few, perhaps no, churches, in which some errors and corruptions have not found their way, it happens not unfrequently that the objections of the infidel are levelled, not against the doctrines of Christianity, but only against the abuses of the establishment under which he lives. As these corruptions afford the fairest scope to the declaimer

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against religion, they are the objects against which he points his wit and arguments. The candid inquirer after truth, convinced of the absurdity of such opinions, cannot believe that a religion which establishes them as articles of faith can be true; and, taking it for granted that the articles of faith which are adopted by his church are the real doctrines of Christianity, and finding them inconsistent with reason and common sense, he rejects Christianity itself.

This, I believe, is a very common way of proceeding; but infidelity, in this case, arises from having too much faith in the authority of men; for if, instead of believing implicitly that the doctrine of his church is the genuine doctrine of the Gospel, the man who doubts the truth of any particular tenet were to try it by the only proper test, the authority of Scripture, he would often find that what revolts his judgment as an absurd Christian doctrine, is only the absurdity of mistaken or interested men.

That a man derives his religious opinions rather from the church of which he is a member than from the Gospel itself, will appear evident to any man who is possessed of common observation, or has the least knowledge of history. Hence in Popish countries the whole nation is divided into the votaries of superstition and the converts to infidelity. It will naturally follow, that the more absurd the doctrines of any establishment are, the greater will be the number of infidels; especially where there are no other religious communities to which the dissenters

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from the Established Church may resort, as in that case they have no refuge but infidelity; for, as I have already observed, there are few men qualified to distinguish the tenets of the church from the real doctrines of Christianity. And I think this is a strong argument to prove the utility of having different sects, that those who dissent from the opinions of one church may resort to another whose doctrines are more congenial with their sentiments, instead of being driven into infidelity, by confounding the corruptions of any particular church with the genuine doctrines of Christianity. It is my firm opinion, that an erroneous doctrine established into an article of faith creates more infidels than the arguments of all the unbelievers who have written against Revelation.

I was born and bred among very religious persons, and in a part of the country where dissenters from the Established Church, or unbelievers, were almost unknown; so that my education was not only religious, but orthodox. Having lost my parents early in life, I became too soon my own master; and it was not long before I began to doubt, and afterwards absolutely to disbelieve, the truth of Revelation.

I was not *led* into scepticism by the perusal of books written avowedly against Revelation, though my doubts may have been confirmed by them. Neither, if I know my own heart, was I seduced into unbelief by the hopes of impunity to my crimes, or that I might indulge in a vicious course without

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fear of future retribution. On the contrary, there is nothing I ever dreaded so much as annihilation. But though my scepticism was not the offspring of immorality, I will candidly confess, that, if I had been a believer, I should have led a more virtuous life than I have done. I have certainly allowed myself a latitude which I would not have ventured to take, had I been a Christian.

My original doubts proceeded partly from the real difficulties which every candid man, who has considered it deliberately, must confess to belong to the subject; but these were greatly aggravated by the theological books which fell into my hands, and which, by their absurd and incomprehensible expositions, multiplied the objections and enhanced the difficulties inherent in the subject itself. The authors I allude to are chiefly the divines of the latter end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century. The doctrines I found in those and other books, relating to the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, grace, faith, predestination, and other mysterious doctrines, and the various and contradictory manner in which these subjects were treated by different writers, revolted my understanding, and I rejected the whole system as irreconcileable to reason and common sense.

Though I was sincere in my opinions, and found myself unable to reconcile to my reason the tenets I was required to believe, yet, upon an impartial review of my conduct, I feel myself obliged in fairness to acknowledge, that I was not a little influenced by

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a culpable vanity in the promulgation, at least, of these opinions.

Publicly to avow and maintain a disbelief of a religion universally believed and reverenced, was rather a new thing in the circle in which I moved, and carried with it an appearance of boldness and singularity. The large field it opened for controversy gratified a propensity I indulged for argumentation, from a well or ill-grounded opinion I entertained that I possessed some talents for disputation. I might, perhaps, plead my natural infirmities in mitigation of my fault; for I am fully convinced that my love of controversy was owing, in a great measure, to a considerable degree of deafness under which I have laboured through life, and which almost excluded me from general conversation, except when I could draw some one or other into an argument.

A perusal of the following sheets will account for the change which has taken place in my sentiments, and will shew the grounds on which I have been induced to admit the truth of Revelation, and to believe in Christianity as contained in the Gospel, not as it is disfigured and corrupted by the inventions of men.

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CHAPTER I.

ON NATURAL RELIGION.

It is often contended that the morality of unbelievers is mainly to be ascribed to the prejudices of a Christian education, which continue to operate after men have seceded from the religion in which they were brought up; and that even their notions of the Deity, or what they call Natural Religion, are lights which have been borrowed from Revelation, and which, without that help, would never have been discovered by mere unassisted reason.

There is, undoubtedly, a great deal of truth in this view of the subject. It cannot, however, be denied, that morality may exist independent of Revelation; for it is an historical fact that many moral and virtuous characters have existed among men who never heard of Christianity, and who lived and died long before it was promulgated to the world.

But though among infidels are to be found many virtuous and moral characters, yet, I believe, there are few among them that may be called religious men. While they reject what they call the mysterious doctrines of Christianity, they affect to extol

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the simplicity, clearness, and universality of Natural Religion. Natural Religion is, indeed, a fine-sounding expression; but when we approach it, it vanishes into air; it is a shadow which eludes the grasp, and which, however fair and imposing it may appear at a distance, will not bear the handling.

The sense of morality which prevails among mankind, and the power of conscience, have been alleged as arguments to prove that there exists a moral law universally implanted in the hearts of men. These two arguments I consider to be one and the same; because remorse of conscience is nothing more than sorrow arising from the consciousness of having done what we ought not to have done, or omitted to do what we ought to have done, and thereby incurring or deserving disgrace or punishment. We cannot feel remorse for doing what we think right; our conscience is therefore, in all cases, regulated by our moral feelings. If our ideas of morality are erroneous, our conscience must be so too; for it is nothing else but a consciousness of having observed or transgressed the dictates of morality, or, in other words, of having done what we thought right or wrong. Conscience, therefore, is necessarily governed by our ideas of morality, however these may be acquired, and however erroneous they may be.

If our moral feelings were derived from an universal law of nature implanted in the heart of man, they would, like that law, be universal and uniform:

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but we find that, though there is no society of men without some ideas of morality, because without them no society could subsist, yet there is a great variety and diversity in the several moral systems that have been established in different nations. Man is a sociable being, and has never been found on any region of the globe isolated and solitary. No society whatever can exist without some rules to be observed by its several members; it would otherwise be a scene of anarchy and confusion. The observance or infringement of these rules is the foundation of morality, which has its rise not from an imaginary natural law, but from the nature of man and his relation to his fellow-men.

A strict obedience to those regulations on which the welfare and the very existence of the community depend, must be an object of esteem and approbation to all the members whose advantage is promoted by it; and therefore entitles the man who yields that obedience to their respect and esteem, and his conduct is pronounced to be good; whereas he who, by a violation of those rules, disturbs the happiness of society, commits an action which, being prejudicial to the welfare of its members, is justly condemned, and exposes the perpetrator to the censure of his companions, and the punishment of the laws. And the consciousness of having by his misconduct justly incurred disgrace and punishment, is surely a sufficient ground for sorrow and regret, or what is called remorse of conscience.

But there are some virtues, it is said, so universally admired, and some vices so universally abhorred,

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that this uniform approbation and condemnation can only proceed from a general and universal law of nature. The fact may be granted without admitting the inference. That some qualities are universally approved may be granted, because there are qualities which are always beneficial, others that are necessary, in every society or combination of men; while there are vices that are always hurtful, and others destructive of all society. Benevolence or generosity is always beneficial and agreeable; and without justice no society can subsist. These qualities will therefore always be admired, respected, and esteemed in all governments, and by every community of mankind. There is, however, a material difference between them; for as the general good depends much more on the justice than the generosity of individuals, a violation of the former will incur both censure and punishment, while want of generosity and benevolence will at most only excite disapprobation.

A striking act of generosity, indeed, excites at first sight more admiration than a bare act of justice, because the generous man gives us more than we had a right to exact; whereas no man can deny us what we may justly demand of him, without laying himself open to the censure of the world, and the penalties attending the violation of so fundamental a rule of society. This predilection in favour of the generous man arises from a natural presumption, that he has added the praise of liberality to the more indispensable obligations of justice; for when the two qualities of justice and generosity come in competi-

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tion, there can be no doubt which ought to have the preference; if, for instance, a man were to commit an act of injustice to enable him to display his generosity, such conduct would be universally and justly reprobated.

Though justice in some shape or other is necessary to the existence of society, its modifications vary infinitely according to the wants and relations of each society; which is a strong proof that the morality of that, as well as other qualities, is founded on the value it derives from its utility or necessity to the well-being of the community. In a rude state of society, the rules of justice are few, simple, and obvious; but as society grows more extensive and civilized, as the relations of men are multiplied, its provisions become more complicated; it is then necessary to define it by laws and precise regulations. Systems of ethics are formed, both as principles of legislation and as elements of education, to inculcate in the minds of the rising generation the obligations of equity and justice. These are the foundations on which moral systems have always been erected.

In all associated bodies the laws of justice are adapted to the political constitution of the state, its various relations, its real or fancied interests, or its prejudices: no association can subsist without some regulations of that nature. Even combinations of men who are the least subject to the restraints of justice or morality,—a gang of thieves or band of robbers,—observe among themselves some rules of

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equity and justice, and practise a sort of morality of their own. Of much the same nature is that species of morality that exists between independent states, whence arises the necessity of a supposed balance of power to prevent the more powerful state from oppressing the weaker. But, unfortunately, instead of keeping the scales steady, there is a perpetual struggle to decide who shall hold the balance.

Wherever men are associated there must be some morality among them, because there must be duties owing to themselves and others, the observance or breach of which is distinguished by that name. Conscience is the judge which decides, and from her sentence we derive complacency and satisfaction in one case, and regret and remorse in the other. But these notions of morality, which arise from the relations of men to each other in their social state, are so far from being the dictates of natural religion, that they would exist in communities where no such thing as religion had ever been heard of, and even in a society of atheists. In one sense, indeed, morality may be said to be the law of nature; because, as it proceeds from the nature of man as a social being, it is in that sense the law of his nature, and therefore, so far, a natural law: but it exists independent of religion, or submission to the Divine will; though it cannot be denied that religion, both natural and revealed, affords an additional sanction to that law of nature.

It would be endless to trace the various ideas of morality, of right and wrong, which have prevailed

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among different nations, and to shew that this variety had its origin in their respective situations, manners, laws, and prejudices. In all countries where the chastity of women is held in any estimation, (for of that of the other sex no great account has ever been made, under any political or religious institution whatever,) we invariably find, that the female who has had the misfortune of losing her honour, feels regret and remorse at having made a sacrifice which degrades her in the eyes of the world, and blasts all her prospects in life. A man feels no such compunction, because the same transgression neither lowers his character, nor impedes the success of his pursuits. This is a strong proof that our judgment of the morality of an action is founded on its utility or mischievous tendency to ourselves or others.

If there could exist a general law of nature or natural religion uniformly impressed on the hearts of all mankind, so as to secure conscience from an erroneous judgment, one would suppose it would have been manifested in an universal abhorrence of homicide, or depriving a fellow-creature of his life; yet in so plain a case various have been the judgments of mankind, and numerous the erroneous deductions of conscience. In some countries parents were put to death without remorse by their children when they grew old and infirm; in others, children were with equal indifference exposed to perish by their remorseless parents. Human sacrifices were not only permitted, but en-

joined as a duty among several nations; while some made it a duty for wives to sacrifice themselves on the funeral piles of their husbands, and others ordered slaves to be butchered and interred with their masters. It is evident that in these cases, as well as many others that might be mentioned, the conscience of those people not only permitted but enjoined actions from which our conscience would recoil with horror and abhorrence.

But even among ourselves, where the law of nature is improved by the light of revelation, though we shudder at the thought of murder, as the greatest and most horrid of all crimes, yet there are instances in which our prejudices overcome this salutary horror, and even reconcile it to our consciences. In cases of religious persecution, bigotry has thought it a meritorious act to sacrifice without remorse, as the enemies of God, all who were branded with the name of heretics; as if the Almighty stood in need of the feeble arm of man to vindicate his rights and subdue his enemies.

But religious zeal is not the only shrine at which hecatombs of men have been sacrificed without compunction. Though, in the case of ordinary murder, remorse generally follows the atrocious deed, which is so abhorrent to the feelings of mankind that a particular Providence has often been supposed to manifest itself in a peculiar manner to bring the delinquent sooner or later to his merited punishment, even in this world, yet instances daily occur in which thousands of men fall by the hands of their fellow-men, without ex-

citing remorse in the perpetrators or horror in the rest of mankind.

I allude to the case of war, the greatest, without question, of all the calamities incident to humanity; an evil brought upon himself by misguided man, and infinitely greater than any to which he is exposed by the laws of nature or the inevitable dispensations of Providence.

If a man becomes a just object of detestation and abhorrence for taking away the life of another, when provoked by passion or goaded by misery and want, where shall we find words strong enough to stigmatize the wretch, who, neither stimulated by want nor actuated by resentment, coolly devotes to death thousands of his fellow-creatures, merely to acquire a name, or at least to extend his sway and enlarge his dominions? Yet, the murders committed by this man are the subject rather of applause than of censure: neither he nor those who assist him in his bloody designs incur the reproach of their own consciences nor the indignation of others. They return in triumph, covered with glory, and challenging rewards and honours. To fall in battle, is as honourable among soldiers as to die hard on a gibbet is among thieves. Strange inconsistency! to pursue with unremitted vengeance the poor wretch who, in a moment of irritation or distress, deprives a fellow-creature of his life; while the wanton destroyer of thousands, the desolator of cities and depopulator of provinces, is honoured as an hero, and almost worshipped as a deity!

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> One to destroy is murder by the law,
> And gibbets keep the lifted hand in awe:
> To murder thousands takes a special name,
> War's glorious art, and gives immortal fame.
>
> YOUNG.

But it is a duty to defend one's country? True, self-defence is legitimate in all cases; but can this, the only justifiable cause of hostility, be pleaded in defence of the excesses of ambition, the rapacity of avarice, or the exorbitancies of pride and arrogance? A slight disrespect to a prince or ambassador, the omission of some trifling ceremony, the least dispute respecting the right to an insignificant tract of land or a paltry island, some speculative increase of trade or commerce, a favourable opportunity of crushing an adversary or weakening a rival; often the personal whim or caprice of the sovereign, more frequently the selfish and interested policy of his ministers; are among the most ordinary causes of war. Justice and necessity, without which, I will be bold to say, war cannot be justifiable, are seldom among its real causes, though they are usually pleaded to give a plausible colour to injustice and violence.

Perhaps the following reasons of the King of Prussia for engaging in the war against the Queen of Hungary, which were originally inserted by that prince in his History of Brandenburgh, and which Voltaire persuaded him to expunge, will present us with a tolerable specimen of the motives upon which wars are usually undertaken:

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" ' Que l'on joigne à ces considérations, des troupes toujours prêtes d'agir, mon épargne bien remplie, et la vivacité de mon caractère, c'étaient les raisons que j'avais de faire la guerre à Marie Thérèse, reine de Bohème et de Hongrie.' Et quelques lignes ensuite il y avait ces propres mots; ' intérêt le désir de faire parler de moi l'emportèrent, et la guerre fut résolue.' "*

Will any of these motives justify him in the eyes of the divine, the moralist, or even of the politician? Yet, where is there a greater hero, a more celebrated monarch, than Frederick the Great? Indeed, he was not only a great king and a famous warrior, but a philosopher also. Alas, poor philosophy! But notwithstanding all his sounding titles, had he possessed one grain of humanity or common honesty, he would never have sacrificed the lives of thousands on such unworthy motives. Neither would he have boasted of the diabolical principles on which he acted, had he not been lost to all sense of shame and decency as well as virtue.

Archdeacon Coxe, in his History of Austria,† gives a similar account of the motives of this monarch. " He was anxious *to distinguish the commencement of his reign,* and to remove the ob-

* " ' Add to these considerations, troops always ready to act—my treasury well filled—and the vivacity of my character; these were the reasons I had for going to war with Maria Theresa, Queen of Bohemia.' And a few lines further were these very words:—' Interest, and the desire to make myself talked of, carried the day, and war was resolved on.' "

† Vol. II. p. 230

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loquy which had been cast on the Prussian name in consequence of the pacific conduct of his father, who with so *powerful a force* remained in what was deemed a state of pusillanimous inaction." This is a strong instance of the mischief arising from large standing armies, as well as of the prejudices that prevail among mankind in favour of military depredations, when they accuse a man of pusillanimity, because, being in possession of a strong military force, he does not invade and massacre his neighbours.

In his Memoirs of Lord Walpole, the same historian, talking of the Prince of Orange, says, " He was eager to involve the states in a war with France, that he might be appointed Generalissimo of the Dutch forces, a promotion which might lead to the revival of the Stadtholdership in his favour." This is related with amazing simplicity as a very natural and ordinary occurrence, and unfortunately it is so; but if custom had not familiarized us to such diabolical policy, should we not be struck with horror at the idea that nations should be involved in all the miseries of war, that thousands, nay, millions of lives should be sacrificed to gratify the ambition of a pragmatical young fellow, and enable him to establish his authority on the ruin of the liberties of his country?

It seems to be a general opinion, that the name of war sanctifies every act of outrage, murder, spoliation, and cruelty. To me it appears only an aggravation, as the atrocities committed in a state of warfare are not extenuated by those motives which in general

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stimulate men to individual acts of violence. The man who from motives of ambition, glory, or fame, involves nations in war, is, in my opinion, infinitely more culpable than the greatest criminal who expiates his crimes on the gallows; while the former is celebrated as a hero.

Bourrienne, in his Memoirs of Buonaparte, says, ix. 2: "Combien de fois ne m'avait il pas dit que la guerre étoit son élément, qu'il fallait la guerre à l'établissement de sa puissance!"* Here, not even a public or national motive is so much as pretended, nothing is consulted but the gratification of one individual; and to gratify that individual, millions of lives were sacrificed, and the peace of every part of Europe destroyed, without the slightest hesitation.

Pradt gives this account of Buonaparte in peace: "Je m'ennuie ici, jusqu'à périr. Il faut que je fasse la guerre. Je la ferai à la Prusse."† Now, is it not a most shocking thing that so many thousand lives should be wantonly sacrificed for the amusement of one man, because he happens to be of a restless disposition? Yet this excites no astonishment; it does not rouse our indignation against the wholesale murderer, who cannot amuse himself in any other way than by the slaughter of his fellow-creatures. And why? Because, unfortunately, it is the common course of things, to which we are

* "How often has he not told me, that war was his element; that he must have war for the establishment of his power!"

† "I get tired here, tired to death. I must go to war. I will go to war with Prussia."

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so accustomed, that we can view it without the horror which otherwise we should feel at the very thought of such atrocities. Yet, so much are we the creatures of habit, that the same man will hear, without concern or indignation, of the slaughter of fifty thousand men, slain in the prosecution of such a war, whose feelings are shocked at the account of one man slain in a duel by another, whom he had wantonly and grossly insulted. Surely, it would have been much better if Buonaparte and the King of Prussia had relieved their lassitude by fighting a duel, than by bringing one hundred thousand men on to cut each others' throats for their amusement. We are apt to consider Robespierre as a much more detestable character than Buonaparte; yet, if we were to compute the amount of destruction caused by those two tyrants, I believe it would be found, that, where one man fell a victim to the ferocity and brutality of Robespierre, a thousand were sacrificed to gratify the ambition or amuse the leisure hours of the Corsican despot.

We are, unfortunately, taught from our earliest youth to admire the Alexanders, the Pompeys, and Cæsars, and other wholesale destroyers of mankind; and it is too much the custom of the historians of all countries, to hold out those whom they are pleased to designate as heroes to the admiration of the world, instead of painting them in their true colours, as the disturbers of the happiness and tranquillity of mankind.

What, for instance, could be more unwise, unjust,

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and impolitic, than the invasion of France by Edward III. and Henry V.? Yet has not the character of those two princes been immortalized, in consequence of those military achievements, which the philosopher, the moralist, and even the judicious politician, ought to have branded with the strongest mark of reprobation? It has even been considered as a justifiable act for a tyrant who has raised a military force, which he cannot easily manage, to employ it in warlike exploits against other countries, in order to maintain tranquillity at home. As well might a dissipated man, who keeps a number of dissolute servants, be justifiable in sending them to pilfer and defraud his neighbours, by way of keeping them from doing mischief in his own household.

It is astonishing that the feelings of men, which are so much alive to the horrors of one individual murder, can be so easily reconciled to the long succession of the most extensive and systematic butchery, without which no war can be carried on. Were our imagination to form an image of the infernal regions, I know not where it could be so forcibly portrayed, as in the horrors of a town taken by storm. There the various personages would be represented to the life. The sufferings of the miserable inhabitants would give us an idea of the torments of the damned; while the infuriated soldiery would be no inadequate representatives of the malignant and infernal demons, who are said to be the ministers of divine vengeance in that place of torment.

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Though humanity shudders at the enormity of that man's guilt who wantonly involves whole nations in the calamities of war, yet we seldom find that the author of all these miseries is either the object of his own remorse or of popular indignation. We never heard that the captive of St. Helena betrayed any symptoms of compunction for all the lives that were sacrificed at the shrine of his inordinate ambition; neither have we ever heard that our own heaven-born minister ever manifested any remorse for all the blood that was shed in consequence of his pertinacious adherence to his fatal and sanguinary policy; though he is said to have lamented its *ill success* in his last moments. It must, however, be admitted, that one of them at least was wrong, and therefore responsible to God and man for such a waste of life and prodigality of blood. Yet we find that the illusions of self-love were so powerful, that they had neither of them any misgivings of conscience; and, what is more extraordinary, so weak is the moral sense, when opposed by passion or prejudice, that both have still their partizans, who, instead of consigning them to everlasting infamy, look up to them with an admiration little short of adoration. If men were half as much shocked at the numerous systematic and widely-extended murders which are the inevitable consequence of wars wantonly entered into and pertinaciously persisted in, as they are at the comparatively rare instances of violence perpetrated by individuals in the heat of passion or pressure of want and poverty, the world

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would not have been deluged with blood as it has been in all ages, neither would it have produced such scourges of mankind as a Buonaparte or a Suwarrow.

It is not, however, so surprising that the hero should be insensible of the criminality of his conduct, as that the victims of his ambition should be the foremost to applaud his triumphs, and raise trophies to his glory. Yet so much have custom and a false way of thinking prejudiced our minds in favour of this greatest outrage against the laws of humanity, as well as the precepts of religion, that the false glare attending the conqueror has perverted our judgment, even in our coolest moments. History, poetry, and fable, unite in decorating the brows of the destroyers of mankind with laurel, and in transmitting their names to posterity, not only without the reproach they merit, but with honour and approbation.

Thus we find all our historians universally applauding what they are pleased to call the reformation of Henry V., when he left off rioting about the streets and highways, to carry murder and devastation through the fairest provinces of France. They do not seem to perceive, that the very same turn of mind, the same unbridled violence of character, which induced him to turn highwayman in his youth, made him a hero and a conqueror in his riper age.

Instead of boasting of his reformation, his cha-

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racter would have been more justly delineated in these words: "Henry was endowed with many accomplishments, and possessed several good and amiable qualities; but he was no less distinguished by a restless impetuosity of character and want of principle, which, cherished and fostered by the indulgence usually attendant on a princely education, broke out in the most unjustifiable excesses. During his father's lifetime his irregularities were confined within a narrow circle, and manifested themselves only in a life of licentiousness, and a course of unbounded profligacy, in which the rules of decorum, the maxims of decency, and the laws of justice, were equally trampled on. But, on his accession to the throne, his contempt of justice and disregard of humanity were displayed on a wider theatre, and attended with far more extensive mischief. The lives both of his subjects and his opponents were equally the victims of his unjust aggression; both were sacrificed with equal wantonness and inhumanity, in pursuit of his groundless and flagitious pretensions to the crown of France, pretensions, which, if they had been realized, would have been as pernicious to his own subjects, as to those he attempted to subdue. His youthful frolics interrupted, in some degree, the peace and quiet of his neighbourhood; his heroic achievements disturbed the tranquillity of nations, sacrificed the lives of thousands, and destroyed the happiness of millions."

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At the battle of Crecy, when Edward III. was informed that the Prince of Wales was hard pressed by the enemy, and solicited to send him a reinforcement, he refused it, saying, that his son should have the whole glory of the day.

This unfeeling and barbarous reply has been quoted by some as an act of magnanimity; and this king had the magnanimity to withhold a seasonable reinforcement, which would have decided at once the bloody contest, and saved the lives of those who fell in the doubtful and protracted conflict, merely to weave a garland for the head of his son. If humanity sighs over the waste of human life so prodigally lavished by such barbarous magnanimity, what must be the indignant feeling of every honest and unsophisticated heart, when historians are found base enough to transmit such unfeeling and inhuman acts to posterity, not only without detestation, but with approbation and applause!

Here I will close this digression, which, perhaps, has been too long; it is, however, an interesting subject, neither is it foreign to our purpose, as it affords a very strong proof that conscience is not always an infallible guide in questions of morality. And if, in the most enlightened age, in a country which boasts of superior progress in philosophy, and under all the advantages it derives from divine revelation, so great and flagrant are the aberrations of conscience, what could be expected from its dictates in more ignorant ages, and in countries neither blessed

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with the lights derived from philosophy nor the assistance afforded by revelation?

Man, as has been already observed, is formed for society, and it is impossible that any association should subsist unless the members of which it is composed submit either expressly or tacitly to some rules necessary to the general welfare. The observance of these rules is attended with esteem, reward, and honour, while the infraction of them incurs disgrace and punishment; and actions are reputed morally good or bad, in proportion as they are consistent with or repugnant to those duties which the laws, institutions, or manners of that society, have, by tacit consent or public authority, established for the general welfare. The regret which a man feels at having been guilty of actions by which he forfeits the esteem and good-will of his companions, and incurs their hatred and contempt, and, perhaps, exposes himself to punishment, is what is called remorse of conscience, and may exist independent of all religious considerations; though it will undoubtedly operate with additional force and energy when the dictates of morality are enforced by religious obligation, and when to the apprehensions arising from the temporal consequences of delinquency are added the more appalling horrors of future retribution. How far this idea of a future state may be supposed to influence the moral conduct of unbelievers will be the subject of future discussion.

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If it were possible that men, while they rejected the *authority* of Revelation, should adopt its doctrines with respect to the attributes of God and a future state, and observe scrupulously all the moral precepts of the Gospel, they would be, in every rational respect, good Christians; but this would be to expect an effect without a cause. For if we do not admit the divine origin of Revelation, it stands only on the individual authority of the writers of the Scriptures, who certainly could derive no claim to our confidence from an attempt to impose their own opinions upon us on the pretense of their being a revelation from heaven.

If such be all the authority of these writers, the doctrine of a future state, which, unless founded on positive revelation, must ever remain an object of doubt and controversy, would again be weighed in the scales of probability; for, if the writers of the New Testament were not taught from above, they were no more competent to decide the question than we are. On this, and on every other point, to reason alone we must have recourse, for if we do not believe in the divinity of the Gospel, it can have no weight as a rule of action; and hence the necessity of faith so much insisted on; not, indeed, in its popular meaning, but on the principle, that, unless we believe the promises of the Gospel, we cannot be expected to be influenced by them.

Among all the nations that have existed since the beginning of time, there has never been formed a society of men professing natural religion; a word,

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indeed, which has never been defined, but is a vague denomination, applicable to all who reject revelation without being Atheists.

In order to judge what sort of religion is likely to be established by Deism, under the name of natural religion, the best way is to inquire what has been its effect hitherto, and what sort of religion has been instituted, either by the ancients, who had no other light to guide them, or by the moderns, who reject the additional light which has been afforded them.

Have the seceders from Christianity ever established any such religion among themselves? There may, indeed, be a few who, from the early impressions of their education, have still continued, after disavowing the divine authority of Scripture, to observe its moral precepts, and to believe in a future state of retribution, from what they imagine to be the deductions of reason. These appear to me to avail themselves of the light bestowed by revelation, while they deny its authority, and are, in fact, Christians without knowing it. These, however, are not very numerous; for, supposing the pretensions of revelation to a divine origin to be false, its moral precepts lose their sanction, and the doctrine of a future state all its authority; accordingly we do not find any system of religion or divine worship established on the principles of deism or natural religion. On the contrary, among those who cry up natural religion in opposition to Christianity, there are almost as many opinions as individuals, every one having a religion, or, more properly, a way of thinking of his own, ac-

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cording to his speculative notions, his prejudices, or his passions.

What mere unassisted human reason can do in this case must, therefore, be learned from what it has done heretofore, when men had no better light to guide them; and it had surely full time and opportunity to exert itself during several ages, in various civilized nations, when men of the greatest abilities have flourished, who, in point of genius and capacity, were not inferior to the most celebrated names in modern times. Yet, in what part of the ancient world do we find the least traces of any religious system built on the foundations of what we call natural religion? A very tolerable moral code might have been extracted from the writings of the philosophers; but it would have been impossible to form any consistent system of religion from their metaphysical disquisitions. Some of the ablest among them indulged themselves in inquiries into the being and attributes of God and the nature of man; a few of them arrived at some shrewd conjectures and rational conclusions, mixed, however, with many false and absurd notions. These, however, were only objects of speculation; a considerable degree of doubt and uncertainty clouded their investigations; what one asserted was contradicted by another, and frequently by himself.

These disquisitions were confined to the philosophers, and were too abstruse and refined for the vulgar; and were so far from being intended for

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general use, that, however ridiculous and absurd the popular superstition might appear to the philosopher, he thought it his duty, as well as that of the nation at large, to comply with it, because it was the established religion of the country: a striking proof that their disquisitions were merely speculative, without the least view of improving the religion of their country, or substituting a better in its stead. And what, indeed, could they substitute? Some denied the being of a God, and taught that the world was formed by a fortuitous concourse of atoms. Others, admitting the existence of a First Cause, did not believe in a providence: another set allowed a general providence, but denied a particular one; some believed, others doubted, while a third set disbelieved a future state. What sort of religion could be established in such discordant opinions, or which of them was to prevail? What religion could exist among those who believed in neither a providence, a future state, nor the moral accountability of mankind? The consequence was, what might reasonably be expected, that no such thing as a system of natural religion was ever proposed to be established; but all the ancient world was either without any religion at all, which was the case with the philosophers and men of cultivated minds, or they submitted, with the vulgar, to the grossest and most absurd superstitions.

But let us endeavour to investigate what unas-

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sisted human reason might be supposed to teach with respect to God and religion.

When a man considers the artificial contexture of his body and the faculties of his mind, the first conclusion he draws is, that he did not make himself; he finds that he derives his being, with all his corporeal and intellectual faculties, from his parents, who likewise were indebted to their progenitors for the same endowments; and that this system of succession has taken place for many ages, and as far back as the annals of mankind can be traced. Further observation will teach him, not only that all other men, but the whole of the animal and vegetable creation, have been propagated, through a long series of ages, by the same system of generation. The only inferences he can draw from such an investigation are, either that this successive generation has existed from all eternity, or that it was the work of an intelligent being, whom we call God, who has created this universe, and established the laws by which it is governed and maintained. I can find no other alternative.

Some, indeed, have imagined, that this world was formed by a fortuitous concourse of atoms; but this only loads the discussion with absurdities, without removing any of the difficulties inherent in the subject. For, setting aside the evident absurdity of a confused heap of atoms, the chaos of the ancients, resolving themselves by chance into the present regular system, we may reasonably ask, what are these atoms out of which the universe has been so

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fortuitously composed? who made them? or have they existed from all eternity? If these atoms were produced by any other being, we must search for that original cause: if they were eternal, we gain nothing by ascribing eternity and self-existence to an undefined assemblage of something, we know not what, instead of at once ascribing this eternity and self-existence either to the universe, or to some superior being, whose wisdom will account for the contrivance and intelligence which his works display, much more satisfactorily than blind chance or accident.

Dismissing, therefore, these atoms as totally unworthy of consideration, we are reduced either to admit the eternity of the world and the eternal succession of the beings that inhabit it, or we must have recourse to an intelligent being, the Creator of the universe.

When we consider the order, the immensity, the variety, and the regular arrangement so manifest in the universe—the wisdom with which the various parts of this stupendous work are so admirably contrived to answer the ends proposed—when we reflect on the wonderful structure of the bodies, and still more on the intellectual faculties of man, it is impossible not to admit a superior intelligence as the cause of such wonderful effects. We know no cause in the world adequate to their production. An intelligent being cannot proceed from any but an intelligent cause; and where is such a cause to be found without admitting the existence of a being existent

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from all eternity, and endowed with a superior degree of wisdom and intelligence? For, though it may be argued that the Creator of man might not be that self-existent being, yet in that case he must have been the production of another superior being who must either mediately or immediately owe his existence to a being eternal and self-existent.

In such contemplations the mind is astounded with the idea of eternity and self-existence, which our faculties cannot comprehend. But this is not a difficulty that exclusively attaches to the being of a God; we must encounter it on every hypothesis; and if we maintain that the world has always existed, we are under the necessity of ascribing that eternity and self-existence to the universe which we deny to God. Reason how we will, we must admit something to be uncaused and self-existent, therefore eternal.

The only question is, whether we are to attribute eternity to the world or to a superior being, the Creator and Governor of the world. Our own reason must convince us how improbable it is that this world should have existed from all eternity, when we can trace its history only a few thousand years back. It is equally unaccountable that it should have remained, for an endless succession of ages, in a savage uncivilized state; or, if it had been civilized, that we should have no record of its transactions.

But, setting aside this argument, how is it conceivable that a machine so complicated, yet so regular in all its movements, itself without intelligence,

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yet containing intelligent beings, should exist independent of an intelligent cause?

Since we must unavoidably admit something to have been eternal and self-existent, is it not more rational to ascribe these qualities to an intelligent creator, which will at once account for the wisdom and design apparent in the structure of the universe, as well as for the existence of the intelligent beings with which it is peopled? On this supposition all the phenomena of nature, which are otherwise inexplicable, will admit of a satisfactory solution.

It is usual for atheists, when hard pressed upon this point, to call nature to their aid, and ascribe every thing to its power and energy. Nature, chance, fate, and other similar expressions, are admirable expedients for carrying on an everlasting controversy, independent of any clear and determinate ideas, and shew the necessity of Locke's caution—always to define the meaning of the words that are used in argument.

If by this energy of nature, to which such wonderful effects are ascribed, we are to understand the effects produced by the operation of the system of the universe, they cannot be its original cause, and are therefore totally out of the question.

If by the energy of nature is to be understood an independent power, co-existent with or anterior to the universe, which composed and combined its several parts, and continues to govern and regulate its course, and formed the intellectual beings it contains, in that case we are all agreed; for what they call na-

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ture is the very same God whom we acknowledge, and the difference between us is merely verbal. But this power, under whatever denomination, must be endowed with intelligence; for none but an intelligent author can produce an intellectual being; and I would as soon believe that a telescope was not the result of contrivance, as that the eye should proceed from a blind unintelligent cause.

If God is the creator of the universe, he may properly be called Almighty and Omniscient, for we can conceive nothing which such a being has not wisdom to contrive and power to execute.

The light of nature, therefore, independent of Revelation, may lead us to the knowledge of an eternal uncaused Being possessed of great power and wisdom; and accordingly we find, that in all religions, however diversified in other respects, invisible beings of dignity, power, and wisdom superior to mankind have universally been the objects of public worship. Whatever difference of opinion there might be with respect to the nature, office, and influence of these deities, it was the general opinion of all sects that the world was governed by them, and that the happiness of mankind, as well as the rise and fall of empires, depended on their will and pleasure.

As to what are called the moral attributes of the Deity, they are not so easily deduced by reason from the consideration of the works of nature. There is so much pleasure and pain, so much virtue and vice, so much happiness and misery, apparent in the

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present system, that we are sometimes at a loss to determine whether such a mixture of good and evil proceeds from a benevolent or a malevolent cause. And we find that the Pagans, deceived, in all probability, by these appearances, had divinities of all complexions and dispositions, and that the being whom they worshipped as the supreme god was often himself of a very mixed character.

In other countries they worshipped a malevolent deity, either co-ordinate with, or, in some degree, inferior to the supreme god; being unable to account for the evil which cannot be denied to exist in the world, and which they could not believe to proceed from a good and beneficent being. It has, indeed, always puzzled philosophers to reconcile the existence of so much evil and misery, with the idea of a being of infinite power and goodness.

There are, however, many considerations that lead us to a persuasion of the divine goodness. The principles of benevolence which we experience in ourselves or observe in others, the love and esteem we feel for it wherever it appears, can only be derived from a similar disposition in the great cause of our being. Our deviation from it proceeds from our imperfect and limited powers, and our inability to gratify our passions without transgressing its rules. No man would rob or defraud another if he could obtain the same end by more innocent means. But a being of infinite power, being possessed of all the means of gratification in himself, can have no temptation to commit injustice; he has no enemies to

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dread—no rivals to envy—no competitors to circumvent—no adversaries whose spoils could enrich him: we cannot, therefore, imagine that such a being can be otherwise than benevolent: were he otherwise, he must be the most malignant of beings; and in that case he would have created a world totally different from the present.

When we behold the beauties of the universe teeming through its immense expanse with animal life—when we consider how admirably the various parts of creation are adapted to the comforts of the innumerable beings that swarm over its surface—when we contemplate the apparent happy state of the brute creation in general—and when we reflect on the various blessings which man enjoys in this world, the pleasure which attends the gratification of his animal appetites, the enjoyment resulting from his social attachments and domestic ties, and the happiness arising from the exercise of his intellectual faculties, it is impossible not to recognize in all these the gracious effects of a beneficent cause.

It cannot, on the other hand, be denied, that all these blessings are not pure and unmixed; that all living creatures are liable to experience pain and to languish in misery, and that death uniformly terminates their career. One species of animals preys upon and lives by the destruction of another. Man extends his tyranny over the greatest part of the brute creation; some he sacrifices to his appetite and gluttony; others he enslaves and renders subservient to his use or amusement. Not satisfied with

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displaying his cruelty and tyranny over the inferior animals, he endeavours to subjugate and domineer over his own species; and the peace and tranquillity of the world are disturbed by almost incessant wars and successive scenes of carnage and desolation.

Yet, notwithstanding these evils and the constant peevish complaints of the miseries to which we are born, that happiness preponderates upon the whole, evidently appears from the universal love of life; even those who are the loudest in their murmurs take as much care for its preservation as other men, and would shudder at the idea of exchanging it for annihilation. Indeed, the very complaint, which is so general, of the shortness and uncertainty of life, proves, more forcibly than any reasoning, that it is considered as a blessing: the mere consciousness of existence,—except, perhaps, in extreme bodily pain, or when the mind is labouring under some strong affliction,—is in itself a pleasure, a calm and tranquil enjoyment. This enjoyment, however, like most of our blessings, appears to be imperfect, and, in some measure, balanced by its uncertainty, and by the consideration that, while we are congratulating ourselves on the happiness of existence, it may at that very moment be ravished from us, and and that, at any rate, we can enjoy it only for a few years. But yet the uncertain duration of life, which we so often complain of, is, upon the whole, conducive to our happiness. If we knew the moment of our death, the last period of our life would be just as miserable as the state of the criminal, who, under

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sentence of death, waits in gloomy despondency the moment of his execution. It appears to me to be clear that, upon the whole, we experience more happiness than misery; and, if this is the case, we have no cause to complain: for we must bear in mind that life is a gratuitous gift, and unless its pains exceed it pleasures, we have reason to be thankful for it.

Still it must be acknowledged, that there is nothing suggested to us by reason, or the light of nature, that can entirely reconcile the physical evil existing in the world with the infinite goodness, power, and wisdom of God; and his providence in the moral government of it is liable to the same objections. We often see the wicked prosper, and the virtuous miserable; nay, in many cases, the unprincipled has many advantages over the scrupulous and conscientious man.

It cannot be denied that many vices bring their punishment with them; but then it must be allowed, likewise, that many virtues expose the possessor to danger and difficulties. If intemperance and debauchery produce disease, break the constitution, and occasion premature death, it is equally true that the brave man, who ventures his life in the defense of his fellow-creatures, often loses it in the conflict; that the generous man, whose purse is always open to the wants of the necessitous, often involves himself in difficulties, and ruins himself by his benevolence. A cold, unfeeling, selfish, calculating prudence is the most likely to preserve a man

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from danger and embarrassment; and the cautious man, who neither ventures his life or fortune in the service of his friends, nor his health in the gratification of his passions, bids fairest to steer clear of the rocks and quicksands that beset us in our passage through life; and yet this is neither an amiable nor an estimable character.

That a greater degree of esteem and respect, in most cases, attends the virtuous is, perhaps, true in general, but not universally. We have often seen the most unjust conqueror enjoying power, riches, fame, glory, and reputation; while the virtuous and inflexible patriot has incurred shame and disgrace for his meritorious but unsuccessful opposition to the encroachments of despotism.

If, by a moral dispensation, vice invariably met with punishment and virtue with reward, the moral condition of mankind would, no doubt, be far different from what we find it.

It is idle to say, that the delay of punishment is an instance of mercy; for an immediate infliction of punishment attending every infringement of moral duty would render punishment unnecessary, or, at least, extremely rare. If every act of injustice were to be followed by instant death, a man would no more be guilty of an unjust act, than he would commit a capital offense in the presence of a dozen witnesses. The delay of punishment, Priestley says, is no objection to a present moral government, because the guilty may be punished hereafter; but in this case we know there is a delay of punishment,

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but we are not equally sure that it is *only* delayed, and will take place hereafter.

The unequal distribution of justice, and the impunity of the wicked in this world, have always been urged as among the strongest arguments in favor of a future state; and in this light they will come under our consideration in the course of the following chapter.

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CHAPTER II.

ON THE BELIEF IN A FUTURE STATE.

A FUTURE state is the most material consideration in all our speculations concerning natural religion; for if there is no future state, though we should be able to acquire the most certain knowledge of the nature and attributes of God, as well as the most correct notions of moral obligation, that knowledge would be of little consequence; for to what end or purpose should we trouble ourselves about them? To induce a man to discharge his duty, he must not only know in what it consists, but he must have sufficient motives to impel him to the observance of it: if he has nothing to expect beyond this life, why should he sacrifice a present advantage to an abstract sense of duty from which he will derive no manner of benefit? or to what end should he speculate on the nature and attributes of the deity, which can be of no concern to him when removed from this world and mouldering in the silent oblivion of the grave? All that a man could be expected to do in such a case would be, to adopt such a line of conduct as would be most likely to secure him as happy an ex-

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istence, during this life, as the situation in which he was placed could procure him, without troubling his head with any metaphysical researches concerning the deity, or with moral duties, except in so far as they would conduce to his well-being in this world. This, in my opinion, would exclude all notions of religion; because religion would hold forth no motives if there were no hopes beyond the grave. There might, indeed, be some sort of worship, as there was among the heathens, to procure worldly prosperity and temporal advantages, but it would go no further. It is, therefore, of the greatest moment to enquire what hopes of a future state we can derive from the light of nature.

One argument in favour of a future state is founded on the immateriality and spiritual nature of the soul. Much ink has been very unprofitably wasted in controversy about matter and spirit, which, after all that has been said, is little better than a verbal dispute. We know nothing of the substance, and are not acquainted with all the properties of matter; of spirit, we know nothing at all; it is an imaginary being, to which we ascribe whatever we judge incompatible with matter. The idea we have of it is merely negative. When we say the soul is spiritual, we only mean that it is different from matter; which explains nothing. If we should say, as we ought, that the soul being endowed with properties not to be found in other substances, must differ from them either in essence or modification, the question would be properly stated.

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It might, to be sure, be argued, *ad infinitum*, whether the difference lay in the essence or the modification, which is the only point in dispute, and is a mere philosophical question. For, let the soul be material or spiritual, let it be a mode or a substance, it owes its existence to the Supreme Being, who may continue or extinguish it as he sees fit: nothing can exist independent of him, and there is nothing whose existence he cannot uphold.

But the immaterialists contend that the soul, being spiritual, must consequently be immortal, while the materialists assert that, as it depends on the organization of the body, it must dissolve and perish with it. Both these inferences are presumptuous and inconclusive. Will the advocates for the immortality of the soul contend that God cannot put an end to a being which he has created? and, whether we choose to call it spiritual or by any other name which conveys no determinate idea, that it must necessarily exist through all ages, whether he will or no? Besides, the metaphysical arguments which are urged in support of that system, if they prove any thing, prove a great deal too much, as they are equally applicable to the souls of the brute creation as to those of men, and extend, in a great degree, even to vegetable life.

On the other hand, it would be the height of presumption in the materialist to contend that, though the soul consisted of matter organized and modified in a particular manner, God could not, on the dissolution of the body, transfer this particle of organized

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matter into another receptacle, and preserve its consciousness and identity in a future state of existence. Such a transfer and continuation are certainly no more inconceivable than its original creation.

It is, therefore, of little consequence whether the soul is a spiritual substance, different from the body and mysteriously united to it, or whether it is matter peculiarly organized. In either case it derives its origin or its organization from the Divine Being, who, to endue man with life and thought, could unite another substance to the body, or so organize its material parts as to enable him to move and to think. In either case it is the immediate act of the deity, and whether we call it matter or spirit, the properties of the soul remain the same, and must always continue subject to the will of him who created it. Immortality, therefore, is not the necessary consequence of the spirituality of the soul, neither will its dissolution unavoidably follow from its being material. The power of the Almighty extends to spirit, however we may define it, as well as to matter: both are the work of his hands, and subject to his will.

Setting aside, therefore, this verbal distinction, we must consider the frame and nature of man, and, from natural appearances, and the qualities and faculties of his body and mind, endeavour to form some conjecture with regard to his future destination.

The soul, whether material or spiritual, is so inti-

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mately connected with the body, that it is difficult to determine where the functions of the one end and those of the other begin. The ideas and sensations of the soul are communicated through the organs of the body. As those organs are developed and arrive at maturity, the soul expands, and keeps an equal progress with them, grows with their growth and strengthens with their strength; it sympathises with the body in health and sickness; and, as the faculty of thinking ripens, so it decays with the body, and, to all appearance, ceases at the time of death; and there is no more reason to believe that the soul continues to exist after the dissolution of the body, than that it existed previous to its birth. All appearances, therefore, are against the idea of the soul or any part of man continuing to subsist after death.

Another argument against the natural immortality of the soul may be adduced from the brute creation.

The mechanism of their bodies, though different in some respects, bears the strongest analogy to that of man; the manner in which they come into the world, their mode of subsistence while they live, and the causes and effects of their dissolution, appear to be exactly similar. Nor does their similarity to the human race end here: their faculties, though inferior in degree, are much the same in their nature. They have perception, feeling, the power of spontaneous motion, memory, and some degree of reflection. And, perhaps, in their intellectual powers, if I may so call them, brutes differ from one another as much as the most sagacious of them differs from the rudest

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of the human species. That they are not destitute of ideas is evident from the strong proofs of intelligence they manifest, and their capacity of being trained and instructed, as dogs and various animals are: and there is no doubt that the wild part of them acquire sagacity by experience. In their birth, their life, and death, they resemble man; their bodies undergo exactly the same change and appearance when they are deprived of life: and where the phenomena are so exactly similar, it can hardly be concluded that the one is mortal and the other immortal.

But, notwithstanding these appearances, it may be urged, that a being so excellent as man, so superior in his intellectual and moral qualifications, cannot be the creature of a day, and that he would not have been endowed with such eminent qualities if his existence had been confined to this short and transitory life. That there is some weight in this argument I will not deny: but, on the other hand, may it not be suspected that, in this respect, we are not, perhaps, impartial witnesses, but that we behold our supposed perfections and imaginary importance through the magnifying medium of self-love?

If we but reflect that the Being who made us can, out of these stones raise up children unto Abraham,—that he formed us with as little expense or difficulty as the meanest worm that crawls upon the earth, from which, perhaps, we do not so much differ in his sight as our vanity leads us to imagine,—it will diminish the exaggerated ideas we are apt to enter-

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tain of our own consequence. Nor, perhaps, will it be found, after an impartial examination, that our faculties or perfections are more than adequate to the part we are intended to act in this world, and that the extinction of them by death is not such an irreparable loss as we are inclined to suppose.

Our knowledge is very limited; and an argument is drawn, but I think very inconclusively, that because we cannot exceed the narrow bounds within which it is confined in this life, we have a right to expect that they will be enlarged in a future one.

Not only is our knowledge limited, but we form false notions, indulge vain conceits, give way to perverse humours and irregular passions, are actuated by ill-grounded fears and presumptuous hopes, and whirled about in a perpetual circle of folly, vanity and vice. The pursuits of the generality of mankind are trifling, selfish, and insignificant, and, in the lower and most numerous rank of life, entirely confined to the endeavour (frequently fruitless) of acquiring the means of continuing their insipid and laborious existence by procuring daily food by daily labour:—and is it from the insignificance of our pursuits, and the idleness of our conduct, that we advance a claim to immortality?

There is an old story of a seaman, who, being asked what he would do with his money if he should make a very rich prize, replied he would buy a great deal of brandy. Well, but after that? Then, says he, I would buy a great deal of tobacco. And after you had bought a sufficient quantity of brandy and

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tobacco, what would you do with the rest of your money? Then I would buy more brandy and tobacco.—The man who smiles with conscious superiority at the simple ideas of this poor sailor, governs his own conduct exactly on the same principle. Is any man raised from penury to moderate competency? he gets a house decently furnished, a comfortable table, a carriage with a pair of horses: when raised from competency to affluence, he buys a larger house, which he furnishes more luxuriously, has more dishes at his table, more horses and more carriages. The great motive of action is, by the acquisition of riches, to multiply enjoyments, and, when no new enjoyments can be devised, to distinguish opulence by a superior degree of splendour and magnificence. But still these things, which certainly chiefly take up the attention of mankind in this world, can have no possible relation or influence on a future state.

Still it is contended, that the idea, the wish, and even the belief of a future state, which have been generally entertained, are strong presumptions in favour of its existence. The wish of continuing in a state of being which we find on the whole pleasant and comfortable, and the dread of losing it for ever, is so natural, and so immediately resulting from the situation in which a man is placed, that it necessarily gives birth to such an idea: but we are not to conclude that a thing must be, because it is our wish or interest that it should be so. Whether there is to be such a state or not, I do not conceive how it is

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possible that such a wish should fail to arise in the heart of man.

The general consent of mankind deserves more consideration. Two inferences are drawn from it, —either that it proceeded originally from revelation, or that it was a notion inseparable from the mind of man, impressed upon it by the hand that formed it, and, therefore, not to be called in question. Might not a third inference be drawn from the wishes we cannot but form, and the propensity we have to believe what we fervently desire ?

If the belief of a future state has prevailed generally, (for it has not been universal,) it must be allowed that the ideas entertained of it have been very obscure, various, uncertain, and contradictory, and that very little stress was laid on this doctrine in any of the various systems of religion or morality that were formed in the ancient world. One of the best and most ancient representations we have of it is in the descent of Ulysses to the infernal regions, in Homer's Odyssey, which may be supposed to represent, at least, the popular notions of the times. In this poetical scene we find, indeed, the wicked undergoing a greater degree of misery than the rest; but we find none in the enjoyment of happiness. Anticlea, the mother of Ulysses, whose character is drawn in the most favourable light, is not represented as in a state of felicity; she rather repines at her fate in

'The dolesome realms of darkness and of death."

Achilles prefers a state of the greatest misery and

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most abject slavery upon earth to a sovereignty over the dead, and represents the ghosts

"All wailing with unutterable woe."

Virgil, who wrote after the Platonic philosophy had become fashionable, has an Elysium in which the ghosts enjoyed, at least, a comparative degree of happiness; and his narrative comes much nearer what we call a final state of retribution.

Still, it is to be remarked, that in all their processions, their sacrifices, their prayers, and every act of their worship, the heathens never had any views beyond the grave. Victory in war, deliverance from national calamity, some temporal good to be attained, some temporal evil to be averted—such were the sole objects of all their religious observances. A similar observation may be applied to the doctrines of their philosophers. In none of their theories of moral conduct do we find the slightest reference to a future state of retribution. Whereas, when life and immortality were brought to light by the Gospel, the belief in a future state produced far different results;—the prayers and worship of Christians were principally and almost exclusively devoted to spiritual objects; the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the dead were the foundation both of their religion and their morality.

Even if we admit that the belief of a future state has been generally entertained, still I think it is difficult to believe that it proceeded from an original reve-

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lation, because under the Jewish dispensation, where we should naturally expect to find such a revelation, it is at best very darkly intimated. It has been said that, being a thing universally admitted, a particular revelation was unnecessary; but, surely, if it was a truth well known, it was not a barren truth,—inferences might be expected to be drawn from it by their prophets and legislators, who are not sparing of such inferences in other cases. The Jews are frequently exhorted to obedience to the God who brought them out of the land of Egypt: why should not, likewise, that obedience be enforced from the necessity of submitting to that God who will hereafter punish or reward them eternally, according as they fulfil or neglect the duties he has enjoined?

Among Christians there is no tenet so universally admitted as that of a future state; and though it would be absurd to represent it to them as any thing new, or which is not already perfectly known, yet it is impossible to read any religious or moral treatise among any denomination of Christians, in which the existence of such a belief may not be discovered; still less would it be possible to attend any of their modes of worship without being convinced that a future state was one of the most important truths on which their religion was founded. But though we possess full and particular accounts of the history and religion of the Jews, there is nothing in them that can lead us to believe that they had any expectation of a life after this. There are no traces of such a belief in their early history, laws, usages, or religious

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ceremonies; we find no appearance of it in the enactments of their legislators, the exhortations of their prophets, nor in the various religious institutions and ceremonies which formed the ritual used by that singular people in their religious worship. The sanctions both of their law and religion were merely temporal. Even in the Ten Commandments, which Moses is represented to have received from the hands of the Almighty himself, the promises and threatenings are all of a temporal nature. Length of days and the worldly happiness of their posterity are the inducements held out to a virtuous life; and the wicked, on the other hand, are threatened with the punishments of their evil deeds on their remotest posterity; but not a word of any rewards or punishments in a future state of existence.

It is to little purpose to refer to a few obscure texts which may be interpreted in such a manner as to favour that doctrine, and which, from our preconceived opinions, we are disposed to understand in that sense whenever it can be tortured into any such meaning. But a doctrine of such importance is no secondary object; it cannot lurk in a corner; it is the basis and foundation of religion and morality, or it is nothing at all.

Tillotson, who supposed the Jews to believe in a future state, ascribes that belief to the light of nature, not to their law; and, consequently, not to any previous revelation.

"The Jews under the law had such apprehensions of their own immortality, and of a future state

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of happiness and misery after this life, as natural light suggested to them; but the law did rather suppose it, than give any new force and life to it."

This belief, it is said again, originates in the common sense and feelings of mankind, from the principles of reason and the constitution of nature. But it is very difficult to know this; nor has this common consent been, I believe, so universal as it is pretended. Its prevalency, however, may be accounted for from the natural tendency of our nature to wish for a continuation of our existence, from our propensity to expect what we ardently desire, and our ingenuity in persuading ourselves that what we expect will come to pass. Thus, such an opinion may easily be formed, and, when once established, it is too flattering to our hopes not to be adopted and embraced.

Conscience has likewise been brought as a proof of a future judgment; but, as I have before observed, societies cannot exist without morality; the moral duties necessary to their existence or well-being are formed into a system, which is inculcated on the minds of children in their earliest education, and by that means become the law of their conduct; and conscience is no more than the judgment of the mind how far they have acted conformably to their moral ideas of right and wrong.

Upon the whole, when we coolly consider the animal frame as well as intellectual faculties of man, there does not appear to me any reason to be persuaded that he was destined for eternity.

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One argument, however, remains, which is chiefly insisted upon, and that is, the unequal distribution of good and evil in this world, which, it is contended, is inconsistent with the goodness and justice of God, unless we admit a future state of retribution. But we should always remember, that all we know of the First Cause from the light of nature is derived from his works; and as we perceive evident marks of goodness in this world, we believe in the benevolence of its maker; but as the good is not unmixed with evil, we are led to conclude that we enjoy as much happiness as is consistent with the designs of God in the formation of the world. What these designs were we do not pretend to know; but our ignorance should produce doubt and diffidence, not presumption and dogmatism.

When we give the reins to our imagination, and picture to ourselves a being whose ultimate views are all centered in the fate of man as the only object of his providence, it is impossible to guess to what conclusions we may be driven. Dissatisfied with our portion of happiness in this world, we are willing to give him another trial hereafter, because we conceive that our lot on earth is not consistent with the idea we entertain of infinite benevolence.

But what is infinite benevolence? If taken in its strict sense, infinite benevolence ought to bestow the greatest degree of happiness a created being is capable of enjoying, not only on man, but on every creature that has been called into existence. And as infinite benevolence is always active, it ought not to be kept

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in reserve for a future world only, but should be immediate and constant; nay, perhaps, ought to have been bestowed from all eternity, and been lavished on as many beings as Omnipotence could create.

This appears to me the meaning of infinite goodness in its fullest sense; but if it is admitted that it may be understood in a more confined sense, and that it is not necessary for infinite goodness to bestow on every creature the greatest conceivable degree of happiness or perfection, where are the bounds to be fixed, but in the discretion of the Supreme Being, to make his gifts to his several creatures subservient to the general plan he has formed for promoting the ends he has in view in his government of the universe? and, on this principle, how do we know but man may enjoy his due and proportionate share?

Our great error is in supposing that man must necessarily be the only end and object of God's providential government of the world. Possessed with this notion, we can calmly look on the sufferings of the brute creation without thinking them entitled to compensation in a future state of existence, because we consider them as inferior creatures, merely formed for the use and convenience of man. We are not, therefore, in the least moved at any appearances of injustice of which we reap the advantage, though we revolt at it as soon as it falls upon ourselves. But it should always be remembered, that if there is any want of justice or benevolence in the Divine Being permitting us to suffer pain and misery which we have not deserved, it is not because we are men,

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but because we conceive it inconsistent with the idea of a benevolent Creator to call any beings into existence in order to make them unhappy; and it is evident this reasoning will apply to a worm as well as to man. And if we can reconcile to ourselves the sufferings of the brute creation, because they are conducive to the comforts and convenience of man, on the very same principle the sufferings of men might be justified on the supposition, that they were subservient to the accommodation or improvement of beings as superior to us as we are to the meanest reptile, which is by no means either impossible or improbable.

If, instead of imagining ourselves to be the primary object of the divine dispensations, we admit the existence of superior intelligences, we may easily conceive that we may form only a part, and a very subordinate part, in the scheme of Providence, and that we may be essentially contributing to the good of the whole, though all the while as unconscious of the fact, as the brute creation can possibly be of their subserviency to the wants of man. And if we should be placed in this world with a view of promoting the general good of the system for which God brought us into being, we have certainly no cause to complain of our existence here, provided it is upon the whole preferable to non-existence; and if the evil exceeds the good in the present life, I do not know upon what principle we can demonstrate the divine goodness.

It appears, likewise, to me, absolutely illogical to

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argue, that because the Divine Being permits injustice to prevail in some degree in this world, therefore he will rectify that error in the next. We ought, on the contrary, to suppose that he is always guided by wisdom and justice, that the system he adopts is the best calculated to promote the end he has in view, of which men may be the instruments and not the final end.

It is said that brutes, not being moral agents, are not accountable hereafter; but that will by no means satisfy us why they should be liable to suffer in this world, by the injustice and tyranny of other beings, without a future compensation, except upon the general idea, that whatever sufferings they may undergo, they, upon the whole, derive more happiness than misery from their existence; and if this is a justification of Providence in the case of one kind of beings, it will equally hold good in another; for as to men being punished for their cruelty to the brute creation, it is plain that, however just and proper such a punishment may be, it can be no sort of compensation to the sufferers.

And whatever opinions we may form of the utility of punishment while man is in a course of discipline and trial, as the means of amendment to himself and example to others, it is not easy to understand the expediency of final punishments, when they cannot answer the end either of encouraging us to virtue or deterring us from vice: nor is a state of final punishment, which cannot amend the sufferer, what reason would suggest as the best means to illustrate the in-

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finite benevolence of our Creator. Neither, perhaps, is the moral accountability of mankind so easily to be deduced from the mere suggestions of reason as those who are brought up in the doctrines of Christianity, and therefore consider this as a certain and undeniable truth, may be apt to imagine. That in a state of society man is legally accountable for his actions to the community of which he forms a part, will not admit of a doubt. But the restraint which human laws impose upon a member of society refers to the good of the whole, and penalties are inflicted, in consequence of his misconduct, on the same principle as that upon which we break a horse or dress a vine, because it is conducive to general utility, and rewards and punishments are the only human means of influencing the actions of men. Rewards and punishments are used as *means* to obtain a desirable *end*. But in the case of religious accountability, rewards and punishments are represented, not as the means, but as the final termination of the moral dispensations of Providence.

God having so constituted man and placed him in such a state that the strongest motives must necessarily determine his conduct, is it just to make him accountable for actions which are the necessary result of the motives which irresistibly determine his conduct, when those motives are independent of his controul?

Publius is born of virtuous and honourable parents, receives the most careful education, and by a happy combination of circumstances which direct his mind

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to virtuous pursuits, becomes a model of every thing that is noble and excellent. Caius happens to be the offspring of depraved and indigent parents, who obtain a miserable subsistence from pilfering and other dishonest practices: his first instructions are how to pick a pocket, and all he is taught are the different modes of cheating and stealing. He proceeds from one act of villany to another, till, after a short course of robbery and murder, he finishes his career on the gallows.

Priestley says,* "If the laws of nature be such as that, in given circumstances, I constantly make a definite choice, my conduct through life is determined by the Being who made me, and placed me in the circumstances in which I first found myself. For the consequence of the first given circumstances was a definite voluntary determination, which bringing me into other circumstances, was followed by another definite determination, and so on from the beginning of life to the end of it." Now, if a man is, independently of any act or will of his own, placed in a situation in which by a combination of cause and effect he is unavoidably and irresistibly necessitated to any definite conduct, how can he be accountable for actions which were the necessary result of the situation in which he was placed without any choice or will of his own?

But it may be said, that the necessitarian hypothesis, upon which my argument is founded, is false and

* Illustrations of Philosophical Necessity, Sect. 2.

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erroneous, and has led me into this error. Be it so. Yet I do not see upon what hypothesis the moral accountability of mankind can be rendered evident. Suppose Publius and Caius to have been changed at nurse, either Publius, brought up in habits of profligacy by the parents of Caius, would have run the career of vice and infamy I suppose Caius to have done; or, being possessed of more virtuous propensities, he would have resisted the contagions of evil example and a pernicious education, and preserved his character unblemished. In the former case he would be an example to shew that man is the creature of habit, the slave of events, under any hypothesis. If he resisted the contagion of evil example, and, in spite of a profligate education, came to be an honest man, he must have been born with more virtuous principles or a greater tendency to virtue than Caius; and surely a man has no greater right to claim any merit for being born more virtuous than for being born handsomer than another.

A man's virtue must be innate or acquired. In the first case he can claim no merit from the chance of birth; and if all men are born with the same tendency to virtue, the difference of their moral conduct must be accidental, and proceed from the different situations in which they are placed, such as education and the fortuitous events of life. It is idle to say one man is honest because he has virtue enough to resist the temptations which overpower another man. How came he by this virtue? If it was originally given to one and withheld from the

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other, it should be no matter of praise or blame to either. If they were originally equal in that respect, the difference must have arisen from fortuitous causes over which they had no influence.

I know it is said, that, though born with an equal portion of virtue, one man, by taking pains to cultivate it, improves and increases his share, while another, by neglect, loses what he originally possessed. But this is evading, not answering the difficulty. The same question will always recur, whence originated this difference in their disposition? If, under similar external and internal circumstances, one man is disposed to improve and another to neglect his virtuous propensities, the former is already more virtuous than the latter; and you must trace that difference till you resolve it either into a different natural disposition, or to some accidental cause which excited the virtuous propensities of the one or counteracted those of the other.

These considerations appear to me of sufficient weight to induce a man who considers the subject, independently of the light thrown upon it by revelation, to doubt, at least, of the accountability and future state of mankind. Yet there is something within us which seems to make us feel that we are accountable for our actions. It may, perhaps, proceed in part from the early impression made on our minds by the doctrines of Christianity, of which moral accountability is the very basis and foundation. It cannot, however, be entirely ascribed to that cause, for in countries where Christianity has been

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unknown, we do not find that men have justified their crimes from the moral impossibility of acting otherwise, or from having been born with a disposition which unavoidably led them to commit the crimes imputed to them.

Upon the whole, I entirely concur in opinion with the late Bishop Watson, that all rational expectation of a future state must be grounded on revelation. Many able and judicious divines have been of a contrary opinion, and thought that a future state of retribution might be proved from the lights afforded by natural religion. But it appears to me, that, in consequence of their Christian education, they are apt to consider as the evidence of common sense, what is, in fact, the fruit of the early seeds sown in their infant minds.

The conclusion I draw from all this is; if reason gives us no expectation of a future state of retribution, it affords us no motives to natural religion; if our existence is to cease when our bodies are laid in the ground, the being and attributes of God, even if they could be discovered with the utmost certainty, are questions of mere curiosity—speculations to amuse our leisure hours, and no more.

If their views are confined to this world, the conduct of the deist and the atheist will be much the same; the one will distinguish the laws by which the world is governed by the name of nature; the other will contend that they proceed from a superior cause; but, setting aside the belief in a future

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state, I see very little practical difference between the two. The being of a god is of very little consequence to us if our existence terminates with this life. What was the existence of God to us a hundred years ago? Exactly what it will be a hundred years hence, if we do not survive the grave. The deist may, indeed, cherish hopes of a future life, but can attain to no certain conclusion by the light of nature. But, on the other hand, the atheist cannot be certain that there will be no such state; for, let a man be ever so determined an atheist, he must admit that he is brought into life by some cause or other; and, whatever may be the nature of that cause, it is certainly not impossible that it may continue or renew that existence which it has originally produced.

Morality, as has been before observed, has its foundation in the basis of civil society, and must, therefore, flourish, in some degree, in all communities; and for the like reason we find, that it is tolerably uniform in its principal branches, though with great variations in its minuter ramifications; for the fundamental principles of all societies are much the same, though there is considerable difference in the subordinate institutions.

But though morality may exist independently of religion, it certainly derives great support from the sentiments which it inspires. The man who has no expectations beyond the grave will be influenced only by those considerations which may affect his welfare upon earth; whereas the man who believes

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in a life to come, has, in addition to all these motives, the hopes of reward and the fear of punishment in a future, perhaps an everlasting, state.

There exists, therefore, a strong tie to bind the believer in futurity, which cannot affect the man whose views are confined to this life. Yet experience teaches us that men, though influenced, in some degree, by their acknowledged principle of action, are not influenced by it in proportion to its importance. The difference in moral character between a Christian and an infidel is by no means what might be expected: and when we are obliged to place great confidence in any one, we are apt to ask, whether he is an honest man or a man of honour, rather than to inquire into his speculative opinions, or his religious tenets. From whence I draw one or other of these conclusions;—either that man is so much engrossed by worldly views, and the immediate objects of sense, that the most momentous considerations of future contingencies cannot draw his attention from the pleasures and attachments of the present life; or that the belief of a future state, which is so generally professed, proceeds more from habit than from real conviction. We received it without consideration, and we entertain it without reflection: it may sometimes restrain us from the commission of great crimes, but is not strong enough to wean us from our predilection for temporal enjoyments, or to induce us to sacrifice them to the hopes of recompense hereafter.

But let the influence of this belief be what it may,

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it is certain that beyond the pale of Christianity it has produced no result upon the moral conduct of mankind; for, admitting that in most ages and countries there might be a vague and confused idea of a future life, it can hardly be said to have amounted to an expectation, and was never the foundation of any system either of religion, morals, or legislation.

Among those who have been educated as Christians it may indeed frequently happen, as I have before had occasion to observe, that some who in after-life renounce their religion, still maintain their belief in a future state.

It might have been expected, that when Christianity was rejected, this doctrine would have shared its fate; for its truth is nowhere *demonstrated* in the scriptures, nor is it attempted to be proved by argument: it rests on the same authority as the religion itself,—that of a revelation from God. If the claim to a divine origin is unfounded, with respect to the Gospel, the belief of a future state can derive no weight from having been included among its doctrines. Yet such is the force of early impressions on the mind, that, having imbibed the belief in their infancy, and been accustomed to regard it as the principle of their conduct and the foundation of their dearest hopes, though they have rejected the authority by which it is revealed, they still endeavour to find arguments in its favour from the deductions of reason, and often succeed in persuading themselves that they have been taught it by natural religion alone.

How far mere human reason and the light of nature

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can carry us in establishing this doctrine, it has been my object in the present chapter to inquire; and my conclusion, upon the whole, is this,—Although a future state may have been a matter of doubtful expectation and uncertain hope to those who have not been blessed with the light of revelation; and although some who have seceded from Christianity may have persisted in the belief of it, as one of those truths for which they are indebted to natural religion; yet I think I am warranted in concluding, that mankind have no *certain* grounds from the light of reason, independently of revelation, to expect a future state of retribution in another world;—much less a state of eternal felicity. My own reason, at least, does not suggest to me any such assurance; I must, therefore, either take shelter under the promises contained in the Gospel, or leave the world, I will not say with a certain prospect of annihilation, but without any well-grounded assurance of another life.

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CHAPTER III.

ON THE FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS OF CHRISTIANITY.

REVELATION being, as I think I have shewn, the only sure foundation of our hopes, it becomes an inquiry of the highest importance, to ascertain whether the points against which the most substantial objections of unbelievers are directed, are, in fact, the real and genuine doctrines of Christianity.

The great question that occurs at the very threshold, is, What is Christianity? and Where are we to find it?

The Gospel is, undoubtedly, the only authority by which every controversy must ultimately be decided: and it is often supposed that any other book is useless in the inquiry, and would serve only to prejudice the judgment, and perplex the understanding; but this appears to me to be a mistaken view.

If, indeed, the mind were previously uninfluenced by any partiality on the subject, it would, perhaps, be the wisest and shortest way to have recourse at once to the fountain head. But such a state of indifference is hardly possible. Those who are born in

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Christian countries insensibly imbibe the doctrines in which they have been educated; and those who are converted to Christianity must receive their instructions from a teacher, who will infuse into the mind of his proselytes the particular tenets of his own church, at the same time that he inculcates the more general truths of Christianity.

Whoever proceeds to the study of the scriptures with his mind thus prepossessed with the views of any particular sect, without any further information as to the points in controversy, will probably find there only a confirmation of his own opinions. A believer in Transubstantiation, for instance, on reading "Take, eat, this is my body," will, no doubt, at first consider that text as an express sanction for the doctrine in question. Whereas, if he had previously studied the merits of the controversy, he would have known that the point in dispute was not, whether such a text existed, but whether it was to be understood literally or figuratively.

For these reasons, I think it may often be of use to have some general knowledge of the different systems that have been raised, and then to refer to the Bible itself, and inquire diligently and impartially, which of them comes nearest to the doctrines which are found there; for undoubtedly, after the conflicting arguments have been weighed, the New Testament is the only authority that can decide, the only rule of our faith, the only guide of our actions and judgments.

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That Revelation is attended with various and considerable difficulties, it would be idle to deny; but on an impartial investigation, I have no doubt it will appear that many, and the most insuperable of these difficulties, are not inherent in the religion itself, but in the corruptions with which it has been disguised and darkened by the errors, the passions, and interested views of misguided and superstitious men. The absurd and contradictory tenets which have been added to its genuine doctrines have justly revolted the minds of many, who, mistaking these inventions of fallible or interested men for the oracles of God, and finding them inconsistent with reason, have rejected the whole of a system of which they were represented as forming the most essential part.

When the trinity, the atonement, eternal punishments for temporary offenses, the mysteries of grace, predestination, and other such doctrines were represented as necessary articles of faith, and faith itself in these incomprehensible articles the only means of salvation, and the more meritorious in proportion as the articles themselves were repugnant to reason and common sense—when the simplicity of the Gospel was thus disfigured, it is not wonderful that infidelity should make so much progress; for there are few men who have the resolution and perseverance, and all have not the ability, to distinguish the true and genuine doctrines of Christianity from the corruptions which it has undergone.

The first question, then, is What is genuine Chris-

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tianity, and what is a man bound to believe in order to be a Christian? Every candid inquirer after truth is under the greatest obligation to Mr. Locke for having disencumbered the subject from the multitude of articles of faith with which it had been overloaded. His argument tends to prove, that the only thing Jesus Christ called upon his hearers to believe was, that he was the Messiah, which, according to the Jewish phraseology, was the same as being the Son of God.

This, certainly, he appears to have proved; but it must be observed, at the same time, that Christ always addressed himself to the Jews only, who expected the coming of the Messiah, as a deliverer to be sent from God; and when he exhorted them to believe that he was the Messiah, it was asserting, in other words, that he came from God,—that the doctrine he preached was the word of God, who had sent him to promulgate it to the world. This was, undoubtedly, conclusive with respect to the Jews, whose hopes of deliverance centered in the Messiah; but when the Gospel was preached to the Gentiles, if the truth of it had depended on the single proposition that Jesus was the Messiah, this would to them have been totally unintelligible; as they had never heard of a Messiah, and were totally ignorant of the Jewish dispensation. The apostles, therefore, when they preached to the Heathens, proved the divine mission of Christ, not from his being the Messiah, but principally from his miracles, from his crucifixion and resurrection.

When Jesus himself rested the proof of his divine

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mission on his being the Messiah, and when the apostles attempted to found the authority of his doctrines on his miracles and resurrection, they meant to prove the same thing, viz. that he was sent from God, and that he was authorized by Him to publish the doctrines he delivered. It appears, therefore, sufficient for a Christian to believe that Christ was sent by God to publish his will to mankind; the doctrine is to be received because it comes from God, without any reference to the nature of the person whom he chose to employ in delivering it,—whether a God, an angel, or a man.

That Christ was sent into the world by the Almighty to reveal his will to mankind, appears, then, to me to be the great article of a Christian's faith. In this there is nothing mysterious—it is merely an assent to a plain, simple, and intelligible fact: nor do I consider it so much a duty in itself, as the means necessary to the performance of all other duties; for we cannot be influenced by commands and promises, unless we are persuaded that they proceed from a being of sufficient authority to impose the one, and make good the other.—"He that comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." This text shews at once the nature and the necessity of faith, in order to practice, as a means to an end, not as a virtue in itself. As it is impossible to come to God without believing that he is, so it is equally impossible that we should sacrifice our temporal interests to attain everlasting happiness, unless we believe that such a state of feli-

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city is prepared, as is promised in the Gospel as a reward for those who diligently seek him.

Faith, therefore, or a belief that the Gospel is a revelation from God, though not meritorious in itself, is the necessary foundation of all Christian virtues. A certain degree of faith is necessary in the most ordinary concerns of life. No man would sow if he did not believe that the seeds he puts into the ground would produce a future harvest; and though there is nothing meritorious in that faith, yet without it we should be deprived of the necessaries of life; so that it is as essential to the temporal subsistence of mankind as religious faith is to the future hopes of a Christian.

When a man who has refused to follow good advice feels by experience the folly of his conduct, he says, "If I had believed my friend, I should have avoided the misfortune that has befallen me." It is unnecessary to explain to the most superficial reasoner that his believing his friend would have been of no avail, unless he had acted conformably to that belief; —he can only mean, that it would have been happy for him, if he had followed the course his friend advised; and certainly if he had followed the same course from any other motive, still the consequences would have been the same. May not a man who, having rejected the authority or neglected the precepts of the Gospel, has fallen into a vicious course of life, which has brought him in danger of present or future punishment, say, that if he had believed the Gospel he would have avoided the miserable state to which he finds himself reduced? It cannot in this,

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any more than in the former case, be supposed to be his meaning, that the mere act of believing the Gospel would have had that effect, but that such a belief would have suggested motives sufficiently strong to induce him to adopt a different line of conduct.

The necessity of faith consists, then, in its being a motive to action. If we do not believe that the gospel is a revelation from God, we must necessarily treat it as an imposture; for it pretends to reveal what God alone can know, and makes promises which God alone is able to fulfil. If we reject the divine origin of Christianity, what credit can we attach to the promises it holds forth, which nothing short of divine authority can entitle to our belief? And if we disbelieve the promises of the Gospel, what inducement can we have to observe its precepts?

On this principle the necessity of faith will be apparent, not from any mysterious merit in mere belief, but because, as we cannot obey a law which we do not know, so we cannot be deterred by threatenings, nor trust in promises, which we do not believe; and as many thinking persons revolt at the incomprehensible notions of the merits and efficacy of faith, as generally understood, I trust the rational explanation I have endeavoured to give of its nature and necessity will remove the objections which have arisen from the metaphysical subtilty and theological refinement, by which a subject in itself sufficiently plain and intelligible has so long been darkened and obscured.

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CHAPTER IV.

ON THE TRINITY.

I HAVE endeavoured to shew, in the preceding chapter, that the divine mission of Christ and the truth of the Gospel are the peculiar and fundamental doctrines of Christianity. The belief of those great truths seems to me to be the criterion which distinguishes the Christian from the infidel: such a belief is undoubtedly necessary, and, in my opinion, it is *sufficient*, to constitute a Christian.

It will, however, be said, that, admitting all this, yet every man who believes the Gospel to be a revelation from God, must, therefore, adopt every doctrine and admit of every mystery which it contains. I grant the consequence. But, on the other hand, it must be allowed, that every individual must form his own judgment of those doctrines and mysteries, independently of the dogmas of any church or the prejudices of any sect.

To all, therefore, who are convinced, or who find reason to believe, that the Gospel is a revelation from God, it is certainly of infinite consequence to proceed with an impartial and unprejudiced

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mind to the examination of the doctrines and mysteries it is supposed to contain.

It has been too much the practice of all churches, partly through interest, partly through superstition, prejudice, and ignorance, to multiply mysteries and sanction doctrines, for which no foundation can be found in scripture, when fairly and impartially examined. These abuses have their origin in ages of ignorance or corruption; they derive from time and antiquity an authority which they could not obtain from reason; and at length receive, from prescription, no less weight as articles of faith, than if they were clearly and incontestably established by plain and direct texts of scripture. The absurdity of some of these doctrines has often occasioned a prejudice against the religion of which they were represented as an essential part. Before I inquire, therefore, into the immediate proofs of the truth of revelation, it may not, perhaps, be an useless task to remove some of the principal objections against it, arising from the superstitious opinions and erroneous notions entertained among different communities; for there are some things which the strongest evidence cannot prove, and which no revelation can establish. It is impossible any miracle can make two and two to be five, a part to be greater than the whole, or that any thing should exist and not exist at the same time.

Doctrines which are contradictory, or inconsistent with reason and common sense, cannot be believed: either such doctrines are not to be found in the

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Gospel, or the Gospel itself must be rejected; for nothing contradictory or absurd can be a revelation from God.

Our most orthodox divines are ready enough to avail themselves of this mode of reasoning when they are contending against the absurdities of the Roman Catholics. Bishop Pearce says,* "Their articles of faith, some of them at least, are of such a nature, that a man disposed to do the will of God, when made known to him, would be at a loss to reconcile such a Christianity to the claim which it makes of coming from God. If he were to determine any thing in the case, it would rather be *against* the divine authority of the Christian doctrine, when blended together and proposed at the same time with articles, some of them contrary to reason, others to natural and revealed religion, and others contrary even to the evidences of our senses."

"It is both new and strange" (he ought rather to have said, it is neither new nor strange,) "that errors of an enormous size, such as carry their absurdity and even their refutation on their countenance, such as are a contradiction to the reason and senses of mankind, should not only be taught, but should be seriously defended."†

"The disputes about Transubstantiation, particularly, are not upon the footing of other controversies: they are not so much a debate between texts and texts of scripture, between reason and reason,

* Pearce's Sermons, Vol. IV. p. 355. † Ib. p. 91.

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as an opposition of direct falsehood to plain truth, a struggle of nonsense against reason, of prejudice and opinion against the evidence of sense. It would be almost impossible for men to be so much in the wrong in any case but that of religion."*

Archbishop Secker argues in the same manner:— "Here, then, we fix our foot: if these things be to every man living evidently absurd and impossible, then let nobody ever regard the most specious pretenses of proving such doctrines on the authority of a church that maintains them. It is no hard matter for an artful man, a little practised in disputing, so to confound a plain man upon almost any subject, that he shall not well know how to answer, though he sees himself to be right and the other wrong. This is an art which the priests are well versed in. But always observe this rule: stick to common sense against the world, and whenever a man would persuade you of any thing evidently contrary to that, never be moved by any tricks or fetches of sophistry, let him use ever so many."†

The Archbishop proceeds to apply this mode of reasoning to the doctrine of Transubstantiation in the following manner:—

"But they have scriptures to plead for it!—Now, if this were a doctrine of scripture, it would sooner prove *scripture* to be *false*, than scripture could prove it to be *true*, and, therefore, by making such

* Pearce's Sermons, Vol. IV. p. 116.

† Secker's Sermons, Vol. VI. p. 166.

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a monstrous absurdity an article of faith, they have loaded religion with a weight which, did it belong to Christianity, were able to sink it."

Eheu!
Quam temere in nosmet legem sancimus iniquam.

The Archbishop is, indeed, aware that his argument may be retorted upon the Trinitarians, and accordingly he endeavours to draw a distinction between the two cases: for the tricks and fetches of priests are not confined to the advocates of Transubstantiation.

There have not been wanting divines, even in the Church of England, who have rested on a broad and comprehensive basis the reasonableness of the doctrines of Christianity.

"Plainness and simplicity," says Dr. Jortin,* "are the characters of the Gospel, if we consider it in itself, and set aside the unintelligible or unreasonable doctrines and arbitrary decisions with which the Christian Scribes and Pharisees have adulterated it."

To the same purpose Dr. Samuel Clark,† who observes, "Vain men, while they have affected to clog religion with absurdities which could not be understood, have made its doctrines (as far as in them lay) not venerable, but ridiculous."

And in the dedication prefixed by Paley‡ to his Moral Philosophy, is the following admirable pas-

* Sermons, Vol. V. p. 428.
† Sermons, Vol. I. p. 30.
‡ Pp. vii. vii.

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sage, in which he not only deplores the evil, but points out the remedy:—

"He who, by a diligent and faithful examination of the original records, dismisses from the system one article which contradicts the apprehension, the experience, or the reasoning of mankind, does more towards recommending the belief, and, with the belief, the influence of Christianity, to the understandings and consciences of serious inquirers, and through them to universal reception and authority, than can be effected by a thousand contenders for creeds and ordinances of human establishment."

Great care and caution, however, must be taken not to confound what our limited faculties cannot comprehend with what is impossible or contradictory in itself. There are a thousand things in the natural world which we cannot understand,—the creation of the world, the system of the universe, all the phenomena of nature, are beyond our comprehension;—there are also several things which our imagination cannot even conceive, but our reason is nevertheless compelled to admit.

However incomprehensible, for instance, may be the idea of the infinity of space, it is still more inconceivable that there should be bounds by which it can be limited. So likewise, though our faculties are lost in the contemplation of eternity, yet the mind is still compelled to acknowledge it from the impossibility of accounting for a beginning. We are not, therefore, to reject a doctrine merely because we cannot comprehend its reason, or fitness,

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or manner of operation: we may believe many things which we cannot fully understand, but not what shocks our reason or is contradicted by known and acknowledged facts.

Transubstantiation and the Trinity are two great stumbling-blocks in the way of the unbeliever; of the former I shall take no notice, as it is universally abandoned by Protestants; though I am at a loss to find a reason why those who can swallow the Trinity should strain at Transubstantiation: it is a doctrine not more inconsistent with reason than the Trinity, and undoubtedly it can be much more plausibly supported from scripture: indeed, there are some texts which, if understood in their literal sense, would establish it beyond the possibility of dispute. That they are not to be so understood, I am ready to admit; but those who protest against such a literal interpretation in this instance are apt to found other doctrines equally absurd on the letter of passages evidently requiring the same liberal construction which they contend for in the case of Transubstantiation.

The supporters of a Trinity in Unity are apt to entrench themselves behind a battery of ambiguous terms, such as hypostasis, substance, and person, and thus carry on a kind of defensive war by the use of words void of any determinate meaning; but if they leave their entrenchments, and, advancing into the fair field of controversy, come to an explanation of their terms, it will be found that they must take refuge

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either in Tritheism or in Sabellianism. They have, however, this consolation,—that, let them deviate on which side they will, the farther they recede from the idea of Trinity in Unity, the nearer they approach the borders of common sense.

I know no book in which the absurdities of the Trinitarian hypothesis are so thoroughly developed as in the first of Ben Mordecai's Letters, by the Rev. Henry Taylor.

It is, to say the least of it, a very singular and paradoxical position to maintain, that God is the Father of Jesus Christ, and that the Holy Spirit proceeds from one or both of them, (for that point, I believe, is not yet finally decided,) and that, at the same time, they are all three eternal and co-existent. Nothing, surely, to ordinary apprehensions is more evident than that a son derives his existence from his father, and that a being proceeding from another cannot be self-existent.

At all events, when we are required to give our assent to such a doctrine, we are naturally led to suppose that it is explicitly laid down in the Gospel. What, then, must be the astonishment of the inquirer, when, after having searched scripture with the utmost diligence, he finds that, so far from any clear and certain revelation on the subject, there are only a few obscure texts which can give it the slightest support? Upon these texts I shall only remark, at present, that one of them—that of the three witnesses—is allowed by all candid commentators to be an interpolation; and, even if genuine, it would by

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no means warrant the conclusion attempted to be drawn from it. Another text, directing Christians to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, by no means establishes the doctrine of a Trinity, still less of a Trinity in Unity. If the belief of three gods in one was a necessary article of faith, surely so strange and extraordinary a doctrine would have been revealed in the most positive terms, and not left to be inferred by the ingenuity of divines from the doubtful interpretation of obscure and uncertain texts.

Not only the word Trinity never occurs in scripture, but it is not even to be met with for some ages after the promulgation of Christianity. Error is progressive. The first step towards the establishment of a Trinity in Unity was the belief in the Divinity of Christ. When this had become a fundamental article of faith, and the Holy Spirit was afterwards deified and personified, the Church found itself embarrassed with three gods, though scripture declared, in the most positive terms, that there was only one. It was, therefore, necessary to invent some system by which the three gods might be amalgamated into one. This was the necessity that produced the incomprehensible doctrine of a Trinity in Unity, which has exercised all the talents of the most orthodox divines (and some of them have possessed very eminent talents) to very little purpose, in endeavouring to render it consistent with reason and common sense, with scripture, or even with itself.

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As the divinity of Christ was the first step to this doctrine, it is entitled to particular consideration. Whoever considers the tendency of the human mind to exaggerate the objects of its affection and admiration, as well as of its hatred and abhorrence, will not think it wonderful that veneration should be raised to adoration, and that what men have long admired as more than human, they should, in progress of time, be led to consider as something approaching to divine, and should at last raise it to an absolute equality with God.

On looking through the history of mankind, it will be found that this propensity of the human mind to magnify the objects of its admiration, is the foundation of all the superstitions which have existed in the world. Nor is it wonderful that the same blind zeal which has adored the Virgin Mary, worshiped the Saints, ascribed miraculous powers to their relics, and deified the very bread they ate, should have concluded that Christ, who certainly far surpassed all the rest of mankind, could be nothing less than a God;—whether inferior or equal, was long a matter of dispute, and the cause of much bloodshed, and of many murders and civil commotions; but as in these cases, where the minds of men are inflamed, and passion usurps the seat of reason, the most exaggerated opinions always prevail, it was finally decided, not only that he was equal to God, but that he was the Eternal God himself.

It must be owned that there are figurative pas-

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sages in the Gospel, which, *primâ facie*, might in some degree countenance the idea of the divinity of Christ, if they were not opposed by a much greater number of plain and precise texts, too clear to be mistaken, as well as by the whole tendency of the Gospel, the writings of the Apostles, and the reason of the thing.

It is by no means my intention to enter into an examination of the various texts alleged on both sides of the question; this would far exceed the limits of this treatise, even if I were qualified for the task, which I undoubtedly am not; but, as my object is to state the grounds on which I have formed my opinion, I shall make a few observations on the most prominent of them, as well as on the general tendency of what we are taught by Scripture on that subject.

The introduction to St. John's Gospel is by far the most conspicuous among the texts produced in support of the divinity of Christ; but so obscure is its meaning, so figurative its language, that it is alleged, with equal confidence, by the Arians and Trinitarians in support of their respective systems: and its original obscurity is rendered still darker by an inadequate translation—the original expression, λόγος, being very different from *word*, into which it has been rendered. The Arians understand it to refer to Christ, not as the Supreme God, but as a great and powerful being, by whom God created the world and manifested his will to mankind. But it

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must appear very strange, if the Apostle meant to designate Jesus Christ under the expression *Logos*, that, after having introduced him under that name, he should never apply that appellation to him in the whole course of his narrative; for neither in this nor in any other of the Gospels is Christ mentioned under the appellation of the Logos. St. John concludes his Gospel by saying, that he has written it to prove that Jesus was the Son of God,—that is, the Messiah, as has been sufficiently proved by Locke: he does not attempt to prove that he was the Supreme God of the Trinitarians, or the Logos or angel of the Arians, but only that he was the Messiah promised to and expected by the Jews; and this Messiah was to be a man, not an angel or a God.

Whoever considers the beginning of this Gospel with any degree of attention, must be struck with the difference between its extreme obscurity and the plainness and simplicity of the rest of the narrative. Therefore, if genuine, as it is universally admitted to be, it is reasonable to believe that it refers to some doctrines prevalent at that time, which are not explained, but to which it is meant as an answer; and the word *logos*, which does not, on any other supposition, seem to be very appropriate, being used on this occasion, and in no other part of the Gospel, gives us reason to believe that it alludes to the Platonic philosophy, then very prevalent in the East, which, besides the Supreme God, admitted an inferior deity under the name of Logos, whom they

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supposed to be the active power, the efficient agent of the Supreme Being, in the creation and government of the world; and that he meant to oppose the philosophy of those eastern Christians who confounded the Logos with Jesus Christ, some of whom believed that Christ was not in reality a man, but the Logos under the semblance of a human form. This opinion is very much strengthened by the certainty that the same Apostle, in his epistles, combats the heresy of those who denied the humanity of Christ. His argument, then, would be, that the Logos of the Platonists was nothing but the wisdom of God; not a different being, but the immediate agency of the divine wisdom, which wisdom was now made flesh, or communicated to the man Christ Jesus. It must, at least, be acknowledged, that a text so obscure in itself, and which will admit of so many various and contradictory explanations, is but a very unstable foundation for a doctrine so momentous, and, on every principle of reason, so indefensible.

Where a text will admit of such latitude of interpretation, that explanation must be the best which is most consistent with the more direct and clear texts of scripture, and which can best be reconciled to its general tendency. It must be observed, that all the texts alleged in support of the Trinity are doubtful, obscure, and figurative; while those that confirm the Unitarian doctrine are clear, direct, obvious, and explicit. The question, therefore, is, whether the obscure and doubtful passages are to

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be interpreted by those that are clear and positive, or whether the plain and obvious texts are to be wrested to support a theory built on those that are obscure and doubtful.

John x. 30: "I and my Father are one."

This appears, at first sight, to be a very plausible text in favour of the Trinitarian hypothesis; but its meaning is rendered obvious and indisputable by John xvii. 20, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." This not only is an explanation of the former text, but teaches us in what manner such figurative expressions are to be understood in general.

Besides which, it is impossible even for the Trinitarians to understand these words in a sense strictly literal; for if Christ and the Father are individually one and the same, then it must follow that, if Christ suffered and died, the Father must have suffered and died likewise; in that case Christ was at the same time mortal and immortal, finite and infinite, suffering and impassible; and, certainly, those who take these words in a strictly literal sense are Patripassians, which our orthodox believers stoutly and positively disclaim. They are, therefore, under the necessity of deviating from the literal meaning of the words as well as their opponents, and understand them as signifying an unity of substance, as they call it, not an unity of person. By this interpretation they indulge themselves in as much latitude as the Unita-

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rians themselves; for it is not more remote from the literal expression to understand by it an unity of doctrine and design, than a metaphysical unity of substance, which conveys no distinct idea to the mind. The explanation of the Unitarians, is, in my opinion, infinitely preferable to the other; 1st, because it is clear and intelligible; 2d, because it is consistent with the whole tenor and tendency of revelation; 3d, and chiefly because the words following that text prove, beyond the possibility of doubt, that Jesus Christ used the words in that sense. In several passages we find the concordance of the views, designs, and objects of the Father and Son declared and asserted; but nowhere does Christ pretend to explain or discuss the metaphysical nature, essence, or substance either of the Father or of himself: and, indeed, what idea is conveyed by unity of substance, if the individuality of the being is not the same?

Bishop Hurd goes very near to assert that God himself died for us, when he says that it was thought fit "That the word of God—the Son of God, nay God himself, should take this momentous office upon him: that heaven should stoop to earth, and that the divine nature should be made man, should dwell among us, and *die for* us."—*Sermons*, Vol. II. 333.

John iii. 13: "No man hath ascended up to heaven but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man, who is in heaven."

Nothing shews more strongly the power which an adherence to system exercises even on the best and

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wisest, than that so eminent a person as Dr. Clarke should have understood *ascended to heaven* in a figurative, while he took the words *came down from heaven* in a literal sense; and all this because that distinction was necessary to support his hypothesis. This is as contrary to every rule of criticism as it is repugnant to reason. If the ascent to heaven is figurative, as it undoubtedly is, the whole of the text must be so too. And the meaning will be, no one is acquainted with the secret designs of God but he that was sent by God, the Son of man, who is honoured with the confidence of the Father. This may perhaps, at first sight, appear too bold an explanation; but let it be considered, that the whole of the conversation with Nicodemus is as highly figurative as this passage.

Philippians ii. 6: "Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7, But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8, And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. 9, Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: 10, That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; 11, And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

The supporters of the divinity of Christ have

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endeavoured to shelter themselves under the first part of the passage, which is obscure in itself, and rendered more so by a faulty translation. There are, however, several particulars in it absolutely inconsistent with the divinity of Christ: the obvious inference from the whole text is, that, in consequence of his obedience, he was exalted to a height which he had not before attained. This is further expressed in Heb. xii. 2, where the apostle says, that "Jesus, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God." I am not surprised that the Arians should build much upon this text, which is certainly very consistent with their system; but it is totally irreconcilable with the Trinitarian hypothesis. Sherlock, however, (without any comparison the ablest and acutest of all the defenders of the orthodox system,) makes a curious distinction respecting the exaltation of Christ. He says, that there are distinct states of glory belonging to Christ, "The glory which he had with the Father before the worlds, and the glory which he received from the Father at the redemption,—one the glory of nature, the other the glory of *office;* one the glory of the Logos, the other the glory of the Son of man." We should be tempted to smile at the subtilty of this distinction, if we were not shocked at the blasphemy of the conceit. To talk of the *official* dignity and character of the Almighty as if he was talking of a secretary of state! On the idea that Christ was a man, or even an angel, he was certainly capable of being exalted;

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but any exaltation—whether it be in the glory of nature, or in the glory of office—is utterly inconsistent with the idea of the Supreme God. Supposing it possible for the Almighty so far to humble himself as to assume our nature, can it be conceived that from such an humiliation he could derive any accession of glory? Can additional powers be bestowed upon Omnipotence? By whom are they to be conferred? "What interest," (says Dr. Balguy, an orthodox minister,) "what benefit, what addition of good, can possibly accrue to him whose felicity is absolutely perfect, and from whom all happiness proceeds?"

If before his exaltation Christ was the Supreme God, equal and consubstantial with the Father, he must by his exaltation be raised higher than he was before, and consequently higher than the Father himself, to whom he was previously equal. Nor can the difficulty in this instance be avoided by saying that he was only exalted in his human capacity; for we are told that it was the being who was with God and was equal to God who was thus rewarded for his humility. To suppose that his resurrection, however it might exalt his human, could be any exaltation of his divine nature, is the greatest of all absurdities. And, indeed, even after his exaltation, so far from being raised to an equality or superiority to God, he is only seated at his right hand. Had the Apostle intended to hold him out as a divine being, he would have said that he sat at the right hand of the Father, not at the right hand of God.

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If we could admit for a moment the idea, that Christ before his incarnation was a divine being, and that he emptied himself of his divinity, in that case he was no longer God when he came among us, for he could not retain the character of which he had emptied himself. But what a degrading idea it gives us of the Divine nature, to represent it as a thing which may be put on or laid aside like a garment!

Although these and some other texts are not without difficulty, and, when taken separately, afford some plausibility for many of the conclusions that have been drawn from them, especially by the Arians; yet, when compared with the superior clearness and authority of other texts, as well as with the general tenor and tendency of the Gospel, it appears to me to be impossible to prefer the obscure, indirect, and unsatisfactory intimations from which the divinity of Christ is deduced, to the positive, clear, and rational accounts in which he is represented as nothing more than a man. I shall point out a few of those texts which, in my opinion, place the inferiority of Christ to God Almighty beyond the least shadow of doubt.

John xiv. 28: "My Father is greater than I."

Now, if the Father and Christ were the same, one could not be greater than the other, and he would be made to say, I am greater than myself.

He says repeatedly, that he is sent from God; that he is come, not to do his own will, but the will of him that sent him. If Christ and the being that sent him are the same, then he is come to do his

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own will, and, at the same time, not to do his own will.

John v. 19: "Verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself." Ver. 25: "As the Father hath life in himself, so *hath he given* to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of Man."

Matt. xxviii. 18: "All power IS GIVEN to me in heaven and in earth."

Heb. iii. 3: "For this man (Christ) was counted worthy of more glory than Moses."

Surely, if he was the Eternal God, there was little occasion for the writer of this epistle to enter into an argument to prove that he was superior to Moses. In all these texts, if the word God were substituted in the place of Christ, the absurdity would be evident.

John xvii. 3: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the *only true God*, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."

Here Christ is expressly distinguished from the only true God, and, therefore, could not be that true God by whom he was sent.

Eph. v. 20: "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

There is no manner of doubt that God and the Father mean the same person, as if it were written God our Father, or God even the Father. It is fortunate, however, that the latter part of this text

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was added, otherwise the Trinitarians might have interpreted God to mean Christ, though they would, by that interpretation, have given him the precedence of God the Father: but as we are commanded to pray to God in the *name* of Christ, it unavoidably follows that they are distinct beings.

Matt. xix. 17: "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God."

Here he evidently distinguishes himself from God.

It is clear that the apostles considered Jesus as a man.

John xx. 9: "For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that he must rise again from the dead."

Indeed, it appears that after his crucifixion they had given up all their hopes, a certain proof that they believed him to be mortal, like themselves; for if he had been a god, his death and sufferings would have been the miracle, not his resurrection. The incredulity of the Apostle Thomas may likewise be adduced as incontrovertible evidence that he had no idea of him but as a mere man. Even after his resurrection, they neither represent him as a god, nor direct any worship to be paid to him, mentioning him only as a man approved of God, by whom he was empowered to work miracles, as they were themselves. He is called an high priest and a mediator,—characters which absolutely exclude the idea of his being the God to whom he officiated as priest, or the King with whom he acted as mediator.

Besides those texts in which our Saviour is desig-

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nated as a man, the whole purport and tendency of the New Testament represent him as such; and even our orthodox divines, when not on their guard, sometimes consider him, at least, as inferior to the Father. Sherlock, in his Fifty-first Sermon, says, "The fall of man was the loss of so many subjects to Christ, their natural Lord, *under God*."

There are a few passages in which Christ is said to have been worshiped; but in scripture the word "worship" is not confined to the adoration of the Deity, but is often used to signify the respect paid to a superior: for instance, Dan. ii. 46, "Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and worshiped Daniel"; Matt. xviii. 26, "The servant fell down and worshiped his Lord."

Much stress has sometimes been laid on those texts in which Christ is spoken of as the Son of God, and as being born of God. These and similar expressions, even in their most literal sense, necessarily imply his inferiority to the Father, by expressly pointing to the difference between an uncaused, self-existent Being, and another being proceeding from and produced by Him. And it has been shewn by Locke, that "the Son of God" was the title which the Jews gave to their promised Messiah, whom, at the same time, they expected to be a human, not a divine being. Besides which, it is to be remarked, that the same expressions are frequently applied to mere mortals, both in the Old and in the New Testament. To cite a tenth part of those passages would fill a volume, and exhaust the patience

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of the reader. I will, however, quote a few in proof of my assertion.

Exod. iv. 22: "Israel is my son, even my first-born."

Hosea i. 10: "Ye are the sons of the living God."

In both these passages the expression is applied to the whole body of the Israelites—a striking instance of the latitude in which it is used.

Romans viii. 14: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."

According to this description, Christ might well be called the Son of God in the most distinguished manner.

1 John v. 18: "We know that whosoever *is born of God* sinneth not; but he that is *begotten of God* keepeth himself."

This proves that, by being born and begotten of God, a divine nature is not necessarily implied.

1 John v. 1: "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Messiah, is *born of God.*"

Phil. ii. 15: "That ye may be blameless and harmless, *the sons of God,* without rebuke."

John i. 12: "As many as received him, to them gave he power *to become the sons of God,* even to them that believe on his name."

2 Pet. i. 4: "That by these ye might be *partakers of the divine nature.*"

These are very strong expressions; and if they had been applied to Christ, what a powerful argument they would have supplied to the believers in his Divinity!

In the first verse of the fourth chapter of St.

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Luke are these words: "And Jesus, being full of the Holy Ghost, was led by the Spirit into the wilderness."

Though there is here no immediate reference to the nature of Christ, yet this account is quite inconsistent with his divinity. If Christ be the Supreme God, and the Holy Ghost be the Supreme God, we have one Supreme God come to assist another Supreme God to encounter the Devil. If Christ be God, he could not possibly require any aid on this or any other occasion; but supposing him, as he is always represented in Scripture, to be a man, it was necessary he should be under the guidance and direction of the Spirit of God, or the divine influence, which is all that is meant by what we translate the Holy Ghost.

In Luke xxii. 43, when Christ was praying in his agony, it is said, "And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him."

Can any thing be more ridiculous than the idea that God should want the help of an angel to strengthen him? Nor will it remove the objection to say, that it was only the human nature of Christ that wanted to be strengthened; for if his human nature never received assistance from his divine nature, it is difficult to say what purpose the latter could possibly answer. It does not appear that it ever came into action; but every thing that Christ did was done in his human capacity, and when superior assistance was required, it was bestowed upon

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him by the Spirit of God. The idea we entertain of God is that of a being, eternal, uncaused, self-existent, impassible, omnipresent, incapable of change. Can we apply any of these attributes to Christ?

It is useless to multiply texts; so strong, indeed, is the evidence resulting from them, that the Trinitarians have endeavoured to evade their force by supposing, that Christ being both God and man, is sometimes to be considered in one capacity and sometimes in the other; and as they see three persons in one nature, so they also see two natures in one person. This, as Whitby says, is really to burlesque scripture.

But so far from removing the difficulty, this supposition only leads to more glaring inconsistencies and contradictions. For instance, if the Trinitarians say that the Christ that suffered on the cross was the same Christ, the second person of the Trinity, who is the object of their worship, then God suffered and died: if they say that Christ suffered only in his human nature, as they are pleased to phrase it, then his sufferings were only the sufferings of a man. In the same manner, it is impossible to reconcile with these two natures the exaltation of the Son of Man and his sitting at the right hand of God. In his divine nature he was incapable of being exalted; and if he was exalted in his human nature, we must suppose that the Supreme God, in his union with human infirmities, contracted so great a predilection for our nature that he continued the union after his ascension into heaven. So, likewise,

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if Christ was God, then his prayers were addressed to himself, or, according to the puzzling system of a double nature, they were addressed by his human nature to his divine nature; and his prayer on the cross for the forgiveness of his persecutors,—upon this supposition, according to which the same being who prayed for them had it in his power (whether in his human or his divine nature is immaterial) to pardon them himself,—is reduced to a mere mockery.

In conclusion, let me ask those who maintain the divinity of Christ one simple question: Did Jesus suffer only in his human, or likewise in his divine nature? If he suffered in his human nature only, his were only the sufferings of a man, which is the doctrine I am endeavouring to establish; if he suffered likewise in his divine nature, I must further ask, whether those sufferings were confined to that section of the divine nature which was incorporated in his person, or whether the whole of the divine nature participated in those sufferings. If they were confined to the personal divinity of Christ himself, then we have evidently two Gods, one God who inflicts, and another God who suffers punishment; and if we suppose that God the Father participated in those sufferings, we fall into the old heresy of the Patripassians; we have an impassible being in a state of suffering, an immortal being dying on the cross, and a just and omnipotent being punishing the sins of men, not on the sinners, but on himself.

Upon the whole, the divinity of Christ appears to me to be so at variance with the whole spirit and

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tendency of the Gospel, as well as so repugnant to reason, that it cannot be admitted either by the Christian or the philosopher. The Christian cannot find any sufficient foundation for it in scripture; and if he could, the philosopher would rather reject Christianity than admit a doctrine so revolting to reason, and, at the same time, so inconsistent with every idea of the Deity which we are taught to entertain by Revelation, as contained in the Old and New Testaments.

The Arians undoubtedly urge many plausible arguments in support of their system; and there are certainly several texts in which the pre-existence of Christ appears, at first sight, to be strongly implied. One of the most prominent of these is John xvii. 5: "Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." But a critical examination of the language of scripture will shew that things are often said to have been, when they are only intended or pre-ordained; and that such is the true construction of this text will evidently appear by comparing it with similar expressions in other passages, where the meaning is too clear to admit of a doubt.

Rev. xiii. 8: "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

This can mean only what has been more explicitly expressed by St. Peter. 1 Pet. i. 19, 20: "A lamb, without blemish, fore-ordained before the foundation of the world."

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And, in the same manner, the glory of Christ, mentioned in the former text, means nothing more than the glory to which he was destined before the world was.

Ephesians i. 4: "According as he hath chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame, before him in love."

If the pre-existence of Christ is established by the former passage, this, upon the same principle of interpretation, would prove the pre-existence of the apostles.

It appears to me, however, that the dispute is not so much to be decided by any particular texts, many of which are figurative and obscure, as by the general tendency of the Scriptures, and the ideas which a fair and impartial view of the whole dispensation is calculated to impress on the mind; and this, I think, is greatly in favour of the Unitarian hypothesis.

If Christ was not a man, his example cannot be held out to our imitation; nor would his resurrection be a pledge of ours. The whole history is that of a man; of a man, indeed, particularly distinguished and inspired by the Almighty, but still a man in other respects like ourselves: as such he was represented by the apostles, before and after his resurrection. There are, likewise, some texts which the utmost ingenuity of divines cannot easily elude. I shall cite very few. Acts ii. 22: "Jesus of Nazareth, A MAN approved of God." This was said

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after his resurrection.—1 Cor. xv. 21, 22: "For since by man came death, by MAN came also the resurrection from the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." Man must surely have the same signification in both members of the first sentence; and the conclusion from the whole is, that Christ was as much a man as Adam. 1 Tim. ii. 5: "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the MAN Christ Jesus."

The Jews had a divine law and a divine revelation, which they held as sacred as Christians do the Gospel; but their veneration for their law and their faith in their revelation were not founded on the sanctity of the person by whom it was promulgated to them. Moses was a man, a sinner like themselves; nor was he distinguished from the rest of his brethren, except inasmuch as he was chosen by the Almighty to declare his will to them. As such he was venerated by them, but in no other respect; they did not ascribe to the messenger the glory of the Almighty Being by whom he was delegated.

Deuteronomy xviii. 15: "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me."

If this is to be understood of Christ, as is commonly acknowledged, and as it is applied to him by St. Peter, even after his resurrection; then it must follow, from the natural sense of the words, either that Moses was a divine being like Christ, or that Christ was to be a mere man like Moses; for surely nothing can be more unlike than a mortal man and

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an immortal God.—And this prophet was to arise "*from the midst of thee, of thy brethren;*" not to be sent down from heaven like a God. If it is objected, that the words *like unto me* are not to be understood strictly and absolutely as of the same substance, essence, or nature, but that, as his office and object were to be similar to those of Moses, he might be said to be like unto him in those respects; surely those who argue in that manner, cannot consistently object to the same latitude of interpretation in those texts in which the Father and Christ are figuratively compared or assimilated.

The controversy, however, between the Arians and the Unitarians is not like that with the Trinitarians; for there is nothing in the tenets of either repugnant to reason, or inconsistent with the spirit of Christianity, or the attributes of the Deity; nor does it make any material difference whether God communicates his will to us by a man like ourselves, or by an angel of a superior nature and dignity.

The argument with respect to the divinity and personality of the Holy Ghost is encumbered with far fewer difficulties. Never, perhaps, was there a doctrine of any sect or religion built on grounds so slender and unsatisfactory.—The Holy Ghost, or, as the words would be more properly rendered, the Holy Spirit, has, indeed, in most of the established churches, been recognized as a distinct person, and promoted to the third place in the Trinity; but, in other respects, he occupies a very subordinate share

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of their attention, and in Roman Catholic countries he seems to be scarcely more an object of worship and adoration than the meanest of their saints.

In every page of scripture we read of the apostles and others being filled with the Holy Ghost, by which we are not to understand a person, but a gift, an influence: the simple meaning is, that they were vested with spiritual powers, or directed by the Spirit of God. This is the meaning of the term Holy Spirit throughout the Scriptures, except, perhaps, in a very few figurative passages, where it is used by way of personification.

The Grace of God is sometimes spoken of in the same manner, but yet has never been exalted into a separate person.

The Jews had, certainly, no idea of the Holy Ghost as a divine being, distinct from God the Father; yet the same expressions are applied to the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, which are used in the New with respect to the Holy Ghost.

Numbers xi. 25: "And the Lord came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders; and it came to pass, that when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease."

The terms in which this is expressed—terms which are utterly inconsistent with the idea of the divinity or even of the individuality of the Spirit—are precisely similar to those used in the New Tes-

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tament when the Holy Ghost was bestowed on the apostles.

Isaiah lxiii. 11: "Where is he that put his holy Spirit within him?"

Luke i. 15: "John shall be filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb."

Acts. xi. 24: "For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost." Again, Acts vi. 3: "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom."

If, in this passage, the Holy Ghost is a God, I do not see why Wisdom should not be a God likewise.

It appears, from a number of clear and positive passages, that the Holy Ghost was merely a gift from God.

Luke xi. 13: "Much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him."

Acts xv. 8: "And God, who knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us."

John iii. 34: "For God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him."

And in Acts x. 38: "You know how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power."

The meaning of this text, according to the orthodox system, would be, that one God gives another God to a third God; and that, nevertheless, these three Gods, the giver, the receiver, and the gift, are, at the same time, one and the same God.

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In all these passages, let those who believe in the divinity of the Holy Ghost substitute the word "God" wherever the term occurs, and judge for themselves whether the effect be reasonable or absurd.

The principal text on which the personal existence of the Holy Ghost is founded, is that where the apostles are sent to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,—which means no more than that their disciples should be initiated into the religion revealed by God through Christ, with miraculous powers, or in the spirit of holiness.

The *Holy Spirit,* or spirit of God, is frequently used merely in opposition to the *spirit of* this world. And in the same sense the spirit is opposed to the flesh, and spiritual to carnal objects. The gifts of the Spirit are the spiritual powers which God conferred on the apostles; and the fruits of the Spirit are the virtues which proceed from a spirit of holiness.

Even the Trinitarians frequently drop into the proper use of the word "Spirit," in a sense quite irreconcileable to the idea of its being a god. It is so used more than once in the liturgy of the Church of England:—

"That it may please Thee to give to all Thy people increase of grace to hear meekly Thy word, and to receive it with pure affection, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit."

"That it may please Thee to give us true repentance, to forgive us all our sins, negligences, and

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ignorances, and to endue us with the grace of Thy Holy Spirit, to amend our lives according to thy Holy Word."

The words Spirit and Holy Spirit are here employed in the same sense in which they are used in scripture, and give us by no means the idea of a Deity, or any person distinct from God himself, but merely of the powers or gifts conferred by him. We may, perhaps, be told, that the Spirit here mentioned is something different from the Holy Ghost: we are even told, that the very expression Holy Ghost is not always to be understood in the same sense,—an admission of the fact, that there are passages in which it cannot by possibility be interpreted to signify a person, much less a deity. Thus are the Trinitarians themselves driven to acknowledge that there are several texts concerning the Holy Ghost which they cannot reconcile to their system; and in order to obviate the difficulty that presses on them, they teach us that the word sometimes means one thing, sometimes another, without informing us how we may distinguish between the two. What pains have been taken, how much labour bestowed, what industry exerted, what ability employed to mystify a subject which was in itself so plain, clear, and intelligible!

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CHAPTER V.

ON THE ATONEMENT.

Another stumbling-block in the way of unbelievers is the orthodox doctrine of Atonement. That the Almighty cannot forgive the sins of men without a satisfaction to his justice, and that this satisfaction is to be obtained,—not by the punishment of the offenders,—not by the sufferings only of the innocent,—but by the death of God himself, expiring on the cross, is a supposition so repugnant to our feelings, so derogatory to the character of the Deity, that it is astonishing that it should even have ever entered the mind of a human being, much more, that it should have been entertained by learned, sober, and pious men. What should we think of a prince who could not grant a criminal his life unless his justice was satisfied by cutting off his own hand, or by the death of his son? The Atonement of the Arians softens, but does not remove the objection; it does not shock us with the idea of the sufferings of the Deity, and whatever might be the sufferings of the Logos, he might receive adequate

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compensation for them. But still, the idea of vicarious punishment, and satisfaction made for sin by the innocent to atone divine justice, is one so totally irreconcileable with our ideas of right and wrong, and with the attributes of God, that it is impossible to admit a system of which it forms a part.

It must be remembered, that the chief part of the Jewish worship consisted of oblations made to God; and we find the term *sacrifice* applied not only to things so offered, but, in a figurative manner, to any thing performed with a view to the service of God. In this sense of the word, as Christ laid down his life in obedience to God for the benefit of mankind, his death may well be called a sacrifice. A similar use of the term frequently occurs in the New Testament; for instance, in St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, xii. 1: "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy," &c. In this sense the death of Christ might very properly be called a sacrifice.

Phil. iv. 18: "I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a *sacrifice* acceptable, well-pleasing to God." This sacrifice was only a sum of money sent to St. Paul in his necessities.

The same observations will apply to the word Redemption, which, in the original, signifies deliverance in general, and does not imply that any particular price was paid to obtain that deliverance; but to understand the system of redemption contained in the Gospel, we must trace the matter to its source.

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Death was the punishment threatened in case of Adam's disobedience; and after he had tasted the forbidden fruit, the sentence passed upon him was, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread until thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." What can any one understand, but that Adam was to be no more; that his being was to be extinguished, and his existence totally annihilated? There are, however, some outrageous divines who are not satisfied with that, but who insist that, by death is to be understood an eternal existence in a place of torment and everlasting misery, and that, in consequence of this fatal apple, all mankind would have been doomed to everlasting torments, had not Jesus Christ come into the world to save a few orthodox believers from this miserable state. A French author observes somewhere, "Si dieu a fait l'homme à son image, l'homme le lui a bien rendu." This supposition at one stroke divests the Almighty of all his attributes except his power, of which it represents him as making the most cruel and tyrannical exertion; for such a condemnation of mankind *à priori* to eternal misery, in spite of any thing in their power to avoid it, is as irreconcilable to his justice and equity as to his goodness and mercy. I do not believe eternal death is mentioned in Scripture; but if it is, it certainly requires a peculiarly orthodox brain to construe what obviously means an eternal cessation of being into an everlasting existence in misery.—Jortin, Law, Locke, and the most

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rational expounders, understand this passage in its real and only admissible sense, that Adam, in consequence of his disobedience, became mortal, and lost his claim to immortality both for himself and his posterity.

Adam being rendered mortal, it follows that his descendants must be likewise mortal, as naturally as that a colt is the progeny of a horse. Nor can there be the least impeachment of the Divine justice on this account. Life is the free gift of the Creator, and, whether it be long or short, we ought to be grateful for it.

But though God was under no obligation to bestow immortality on man, or to extend his being beyond this transitory life, yet he was graciously pleased to afford him the means of being restored to that immortality which had been forfeited by the transgression of Adam; and for this purpose Christ was sent into the world, to bring life and immortality to light through the Gospel, that is, to announce to mankind the certainty of a future state, and to teach them how they might secure to themselves a happy immortality, by repentance and a virtuous life. Those who are of opinion that all these things were already sufficiently taught by the law of nature, have puzzled themselves with several mysterious doctrines which are held out as essential to salvation, independently of moral duties, and the most extravagant notions of the merit of faith have been propagated through the Christian world. I have already explained, that faith is only valuable as a

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means. Christ came to save those that believe, that is, those who give so much credit to his revelation as to endeavour, by the virtuous life he prescribed, to attain the happy immortality he promised.

So far from the salvation of mankind depending on mere belief or the merits of faith, in all the descriptions we have of the last judgment, faith is nowhere placed among those qualities which shall entitle man to reward or rescue him from punishment. On the contrary, it appears that even those who had faith sufficient to prophesy in the name of Christ, to cast out devils, and to perform many wonderful works, were rejected among the workers of iniquity. Faith is only valuable as the path to righteousness; but righteousness, whether the fruit of faith or reason, will be acceptable. Repentance or a virtuous life was the doctrine preached by Christ. The sanction of this doctrine was the promise of immortal life; but this promise would not be of any authority, unless Christ was believed to come from God, or, according to the Jewish language, to be the Messiah. This appears to me to be the whole of the Scripture doctrine of faith, which has been converted into such a mysterious and inconceivable obligation.

There is one objection, however, and a very important one, to the hypothesis, that Christ came from God to reveal the universal restoration of mankind to immortality, and to instruct them in the means of obtaining felicity in the next world. It will be said, if such a communication was neces-

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sary, it ought to have been made to all mankind, since all are equally interested in it; whereas it came very late, and the knowledge of it has been confined, even since its promulgation, to comparatively a small portion of the human race. In answer to this I shall observe, that it appears to me highly probable (and, indeed, this opinion is confirmed by numberless texts of scripture), that Christ not only was sent to reveal the restoration of mankind, but that he was himself the instrument by which God thought proper to effect this restoration.

Here, however, we must be careful to steer clear of the erroneous ideas of satisfaction which have so long prevailed in almost every Christian church, as if God could not pardon the sins of men freely without punishing their offenses either on themselves, or on some innocent being who would consent to be the sacrifice, and whose punishment would be the more agreeable to divine justice because unmerited. This is absolutely denying the mercy of God; for if he cannot forgive without due compensation, he is not merciful; and, at the same time, gives such an idea of his justice as contradicts every idea of that virtue ever entertained by reasonable men. God's ways, we are told, are not as our ways; but what notion can we entertain of the Divine attributes, but from our own ideas of the qualities ascribed to him? If, under the name of justice and mercy, we suppose him to act in a manner exactly the reverse of our own notions of justice and mercy, there are no ideas annexed to

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words; and if his justice is the reverse of our notions of justice, why may not his veracity differ equally from the ideas we entertain of that quality, and then where is our reliance in his promises?

When Christ tells us that God is good and merciful, he either means that we should understand him according to our ideas of goodness and mercy, or what he said was unintelligible. We are told to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect, and, still more to the point, to be merciful as our Father in heaven is merciful, and are even taught to pray daily to God to forgive us our faults as we forgive them that trespass against us. Now, if the mercy of God cannot pardon without an equivalent, or compensation, or satisfaction, it will follow, that we also are not required to forgive freely, nor unless the like satisfaction be offered to us.

We may, however, suppose, that there was something more in the mission of Christ than merely the revelation of a future state and the disclosure of the means by which we might make it a happy one. But whatever it was, it was the free, spontaneous gift of God himself, who *sent* Jesus Christ for that purpose; and the latter was only the instrument of his Father to effect that great work, for which he was amply rewarded.

Let us consider this very remarkable text, 1 Cor. xv. 21, 22: "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection from the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." The natural construction of this passage is,

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that as mortality was the consequence of Adam's transgression, so the restoration of mankind to immortality was effected by the instrumentality of the man Christ Jesus. In this sense the death of Christ might, without much impropriety, be called an atonement, not for the sins of men in general, but for the particular transgression of Adam. Or, to explain myself more properly, if, in consequence of Adam's disobedience, all men were involved in the sentence of death passed upon him, why might not the perfect obedience of Christ, "who, for the glory that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of God," reverse that sentence and restore them to the immortality from which they had fallen? Considered in this light, the death of Christ, as it was the necessary consequence of the scheme adopted by Divine Wisdom, as it was the strongest proof he could give of his obedience, and a necessary prelude to his resurrection, might undoubtedly, in a metaphorical sense, be represented as a sacrifice, an atonement; and, even without any metaphor whatever, he may be said to have suffered for us;—not instead of us, but for our advantage, on our account.

If, by the expression that Christ died for us, we are to understand that he died in our stead, he must have suffered that death which we should otherwise have incurred. But is that the case here? Put what construction you please on the word *die*, yet it will be found that in no sense will it bear this

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conclusion. If you suppose that it means *eternal* death, as the divines call it, it is certainly not applicable to Christ, who suffered no such death; if you understand by it temporal or natural death, it is equally inapplicable; for though Christ suffered this death, he certainly did not suffer it in our stead, for we all remain subject to it. It is, therefore, only by the use of equivocal terms that such a meaning can be forced upon that expression. We are told, that Christ died in our stead, because, by suffering temporal, he saved us from eternal death; and this is called explaining scripture!

The obedience and the sufferings of Christ on our account were rewarded by the Supreme Being, by whom he was sent, and in obedience to whom he submitted to suffer and die on the cross. He was exalted into heaven, where he sitteth on the right hand of God. This means the enjoyment of great power and authority, which is sometimes called his kingdom; so that it is plainly intimated that he is invested with glory and power and dominion, all which are conferred upon him in consequence of his obedience here on earth. By this power conferred on Christ, it is probable the dead will be raised, and he will judge the world on the last day. If there is any ground for this supposition, it will appear, that though the revelation of Jesus was preached only to few, the benefits of his coming will extend to the whole world, who will all equally appear before his judgment-seat.

I believe the Unitarians in general do not admit

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this kingdom of Christ to the extent here described; but I see no reason why they should not, as well as the Arians. The power, dominion, kingdom, and glory bestowed on Christ, as a reward for his obedience and sufferings, are conferred by the free grace of God; it makes no difference whether the person on whom they are bestowed was originally a man or an angel; if he was the former, his nature was exalted beyond the common nature of man, as we expect our own nature will be in a future state. It is not unreasonable in itself, and it is an opinion strongly supported by many texts of scripture, that the same being who brought life and immortality to light will be the person who shall dispense these blessings to those who may have rendered themselves worthy of them. If Christ was merely a preacher of righteousness, or if he came only to reveal doctrines which might be supposed necessary motives to induce us to adopt a virtuous course of life, it will be difficult to account for the very partial and narrow promulgation of a law which is represented by some to be necessary to salvation.

It will, no doubt, be objected by the Trinitarians, that a mere man could not reconcile an angry and offended God by any thing in his power to do, that it required more meritorious sufferings to atone for the sins of men. The imperfection of language obliges us often to use very inadequate expressions respecting the Deity, which are frequently the means of introducing erroneous opinions. Thus, to express that God condemns or disapproves of any particular

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act, it is often said, that God is offended by it; and we hear every day of the necessity of the punishment of the wicked to vindicate the glory of God; as if such insignificant beings as we are could, in a literal sense, increase or diminish the glory of God; or as if he could be offended with man in the same sense in which men are offended with one another, which always implies some emotion of uneasiness or resentment. If we were to vary the phrase a little, and to say that God is rendered unhappy, instead of being offended, the absurdity would strike us at once. Thus we evidently pervert the meaning of such expressions, when we say, that the offended glory of God requires the punishment of offenders.

But, after all, why must the God of the Christian be always an angry and an offended God? Why must his mercy be always circumscribed in the narrowest limits, and his anger and vengeance be without bounds? Such is not the account he gives of himself, when he says, he visits the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate him, but shews mercy unto thousands in them that love him and keep his commandments: such is the God of heaven, but not such is the God of theologians. Now, if his mercy is only commensurate with his rigour, is there any absurdity in believing, that the obedience of one man might restore what was lost by the disobedience of another? and that the man Christ might recover that immortality which the transgressions of Adam would otherwise have forfeited for

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ever? This is a plain, a simple and credible account, as given in the text above cited; and with a mind impressed with the strongest notions of the mercy and benevolence of the Deity, I own I find it more difficult to account for the rigour of the fate entailed upon mankind by the sentence passed upon Adam, than for the revocation of the harshest part of it in consequence of the merits and obedience of the man Christ Jesus; who, as a reward for that obedience, may have been invested by the Almighty with power to shew mercy to all mankind, when they finally appear before him as their Judge.

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CHAPTER VI.

ON THE ETERNITY OF PUNISHMENT.

In answer to the views stated in the preceding chapter, it may be objected, that if the sentence passed on mankind, after Adam's transgression, extended only to the extinction of being, and death was only the cessation of animal life, Christ, by restoring men to immortality, did certainly confer an inestimable blessing on those who were to be rewarded with eternal felicity, but that it was at the expense of those who were rescued from a state of non-entity only to be consigned to eternal punishment. The system of those who suppose that the sentence against Adam implied a state of everlasting suffering after death, stands undoubtedly clear of this objection. Their system confers the highest blessings on the righteous, and only leaves the damned where it found them.

It must be owned, that the objection is both weighty in itself and leads to the most weighty considerations. The great question is, are eternal punishments reconcileable to the mercy and justice of God?

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We can only conceive the propriety of punishment as a corrective in a state of discipline, but cannot account for it as the final condition of mankind; neither is it consistent with our ideas of equity, that the transgressions of a finite, temporary being, should be punished by sufferings of eternal duration; there certainly, to our apprehensions, are no proportions between the crime and the punishment. The infliction of pain on any creature, when it cannot be productive of improvement to the sufferer, either in this or a future state, appears rather a vindictive than a correctionary measure.

It is said, to be sure, that as the happiness of the righteous will be eternal, it is but just that the sufferings of the wicked should be of equal duration; but the analogy is fallacious. Though the most virtuous of mankind can have no claim to everlasting happiness from his own merits, yet there is nothing either unreasonable or unjust in the idea that *Infinite* Goodness should bestow rewards to which man has no claim, and which are the gratuitous gift of Divine Benevolence. But neither the justice nor the goodness of God will permit him to inflict punishment more severe than is merited by the sinner. Let me appeal to the most vindictive and rancorous of mankind,—let him ask his own implacable breast, whether he would wish his greatest enemy to be consigned to everlasting torments. Bad and depraved as human nature is, I flatter myself that there is no man who, in his cool and sober moments, could form so diabolical a wish, however justly that enemy might

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have incurred his resentment. And if neither the collision of interests, the rivalry of emulation, the sense of wrongs sustained, injuries wantonly inflicted,—if neither the insolence of tyranny nor the weight of oppression, could draw a cool and deliberate wish of so uncharitable a nature from such a frail, imperfect and irritable being as man, can it be believed that such a principle should regulate the conduct of the Father of Mercies?

If the most fertile imagination were to be let loose to form an idea of the most cruel and malevolent being, endued with a wish to find out and infinite power to contrive the greatest tortures, and to inflict the greatest misery, could that imagination suggest any thing more cruel and inhuman than the infliction of infinite and everlasting punishment? We are supposed to have some account of the Devil in Scripture, though there is not so much said of him as many people imagine. Poets and orators have enlarged on his wickedness and depravity: but neither in the relations of scripture, in the fiction of poets, nor the declamation of orators, does he appear in so hateful a light as our orthodox divines represent the God of Love and Mercy, when they suppose that this benevolent Being will condemn a large portion of mankind to be literally consumed by fire for an endless succession of ages. Yet this opinion has not been confined to ages of ignorance; it appears to be the doctrine of our church, and was supported by the late Bishop Horsley. His lordship says, and very justly, that the present life, even

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if it were much longer, must always be short if compared with eternity: and, therefore, an eternal punishment, even if much less severe than that which it is supposed will be the portion of the wicked, could not be reconciled to our idea of justice, because there can be no comparison between finite and infinite, between time and eternity.

The Bishop's attempt to account for the eternity of punishment is, if possible, even worse than the doctrine itself. He supposes that the eternal sufferings of these poor devoted wretches *may* be necessary to confirm the elect in their obedience, and to prevent their swerving from rectitude, and by that means forfeiting the enjoyment of a felicity which, till his lordship wrote, we had been taught to believe was to be eternal, but which, according to his doctrine, is only contingent. But if, notwithstanding the promises of the Gospel, the happy may fall from their blessed state by swerving from rectitude, why may not also the wicked be relieved from punishment by repentance and conversion? Why must every deviation from the letter of the law, as supposed to be written in the Gospel, be towards punishment, while the door of mercy remains for ever closed?

The Bishop seems to have borrowed this idea, not from the Gospel, but from the Spartan history, where we find the slaves were made drunk, that the children of the Spartans might, by their example, be induced to avoid so shameful and degrading a vice. According to this view, the wicked would

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suffer, not so much as a punishment for their sins as for a warning to others, and would be made a sacrifice to secure the permanent felicity of the elect. If the virtue of the blessed is so frail, that the fear of losing the enjoyment of a blessed eternity is not sufficient to maintain their perseverance, are we to believe that Almighty Power and Goodness could not supply motives as forcible to preserve their integrity, without keeping so many victims in a state of eternal misery?

It is melancholy to observe that a man like the late Bishop Watson should have fallen into a similiar mode of reasoning. In the 32d page of the first volume of the Anecdotes of his Life, he observes, very justly, "Reason is shocked at the idea of God being considered as a relentless tyrant, inflicting everlasting punishment which answers no benevolent end." But, then, he contrives to escape from the conclusion that must naturally be drawn from his observation, by the gratuitous supposition that some benevolent end *may possibly* be answered, by keeping the righteous in everlasting holiness and obedience. What an idea does he give us of the Almighty!—that a Being of infinite power and goodness cannot bestow everlasting happiness on some of his creatures, without committing on others what the learned prelate himself designates as an act of relentless tyranny!

The belief of eternal punishment has given a meaning to the word damnation which does not, in the original language, belong to it; and the signifi-

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cation it has thus acquired has afforded support to the doctrine itself. Every unlearned reader by damnation understands a condemnation to eternal misery; but its literal meaning is merely *condemnation*, and is just as applicable to any other penalty, whatever be its nature or its duration.

It must be owned, however, that the doctrine of eternal punishment is very ancient, and has almost universally prevailed in the Christian church; and that there are many texts in Scripture which seem to confirm it, though, perhaps, on close examination, they may be explained in a manner more consistent with the ideas we entertain of the goodness and benevolence of the Divine Being: and this inquiry is the more important, as on the issue of it the credit of Christianity in a great measure depends; for the idea of an omnipotent Being of perfect goodness and benevolence, and that of a Being who consigns to everlasting torments creatures that are the work of his hands, whom he has formed of his own accord, and whom he was under no necessity of calling into existence, are, in my opinion, two ideas absolutely inconsistent and contradictory.

There are two ways of explaining the passages in Scripture supposed to favour this doctrine, without admitting the eternity of punishments. The first, by understanding the word eternal in a more indefinite sense; the other, that the final punishment will consist in the total destruction and annihilation of the sinner. The accounts we have on this subject are highly figurative: sometimes the punishment of

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the wicked is represented as an exclusion from happiness, sometimes as a total destruction, sometimes as a state of actual and positive suffering.

Those who contend for a limited duration of punishment say, that the word eternal is susceptible of a less precise and determinate explanation than is usually understood, and may only mean a long but not eternal duration. But if we take the nature of the punishment in its literal sense (that of being consumed by fire), or in any sense that will bear the least affinity to sufferings so intense, a very long duration of such torment is almost as shocking to our feelings as an absolute eternity.

It is, also, very judiciously contended, on the other side, that as the same word is used to express the duration of the happiness of the just and of the miseries of the wicked, it must, according to every rule of criticism, be understood in the same sense. Admitting, however, the force of the argument, I would rather take it in the loose and indeterminate sense than in the positive one. In both cases, on this hypothesis, the wicked will be consigned to a state of suffering for a time, till they are corrected and reformed, and after this purgation be admitted to a state of felicity; in other words, they substitute the purgatory of the Catholics for the hell of the Protestants. This opinion, however, has little countenance either from any particular texts or from the whole tenor of Scripture, which represents that state as final, in which men shall be placed on their departure from this life.

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It appears to me more consonant to the language of Scripture to believe that the wicked will be condemned to everlasting destruction or annihilation; and I believe, on strict examination, there are few or none of the texts alluding to this great event, which, if some allowance be made for the figurative language in which they are delivered, may not be reconciled with this opinion. To be deprived for ever of existence in a state of happiness, is, in every sense of the word, an eternal punishment; for if such an exclusion is a punishment, (which few will be inclined to deny,) as it is to continue for ever, it is therefore everlasting. It is, certainly, an eternal death, in a much more positive and literal sense than that in which it has been represented. If the world, as many suppose, is to be destroyed by fire, it is not improbable that the wicked may perish in the conflagration, which may have given rise to the expressions used in Scripture on this occasion. Whether they shall be restored to life previously to their final destruction by fire or otherwise, does not affect the argument.

The total destruction and annihilation of the wicked, though certainly a heavy misfortune, is entirely reconcileable with the equity and goodness of God. As he was under no obligation to give them life, he cannot be bound to continue it longer than he chooses, especially after they have proved themselves, by their conduct, unworthy of it. On the contrary, it is absolutely consistent both with his goodness and justice to put an end to the existence

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of a mischievous being, whose life is a constant source of uneasiness and vexation to other beings much better than himself.

It is objected to this system, that the soul, being immortal, must exist somewhere, either in a state of happiness or misery: these objectors find themselves under the necessity of sending it either to heaven or to hell, not knowing how they could otherwise dispose of it. The providence of God may, perhaps, find itself under no such embarrassment. Without entering into any metaphysical disquisitions upon the nature of the soul, I shall only observe, that both the soul and body are the work of God's hands, and that they are both subject to his power and dependent on his will.

The sentence passed on Adam, as I have before observed, was a sentence of annihilation. Those commentators who think that dying and living for ever in a state of torment are convertible terms, will find it difficult to interpret the passage where St. Paul says, "as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive." If the sentence on Adam meant damnation, and not natural death, the same must be the meaning of the word *die* in this passage; for Christ came to deliver mankind from the death inflicted on them by Adam's fall. Therefore, if Adam's sentence was damnation, the meaning of St. Paul must be, As in Adam all were damned, so in Christ shall all be saved;—and by this exposition the same people shall be damned and saved. What can be more absurd and contradictory! Whereas, by taking

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the words in their plain and literal sense, they are perfectly consistent and intelligible. Adam and his posterity, in consequence of his disobedience, were rendered mortal and subject to death, and Christ came to restore them to the means of gaining the immortality which Adam lost.

Another objection is, that, if the wicked should only be annihilated, they would suffer no punishment, or, at least, no punishment adequate to their sins. I pity the understanding of those who can discover no punishment in annihilation, and being deprived of an eternity of celestial bliss; but I detest the heart of the man who finds such a punishment insufficient to satisfy his vindictive zeal. If being deprived of a life of happiness through an endless succession of ages, and being condemned to annihilation for ever, will not satisfy the rigorous justice of the relentless sons of the church, I shall only say, that it is happy for poor mortals that God's ways are not their ways. The severest punishment that can be inflicted by human laws is death; a punishment which has been thought by many too severe for the most enormous offenses: and what is death but being deprived of a few years' existence?—I will not say in this abode of guilt and misery, because, in matters of argument, I wish to avoid all exaggerated declamation,—but it is, at most, an exclusion from a world where there is, indeed, a mixture of happiness and misery, of suffering and enjoyment; but in which those who fall by the hand of justice are, in general, so circumstanced as to have reason to

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expect more of the bitter and less of the sweet than the generality of mankind. Now, if an exclusion for a few years from a scene of such precarious happiness is considered the greatest punishment that can be inflicted, will it be thought no punishment at all to be excluded for ever from the enjoyment of perfect and everlasting felicity? To minds unwarped by superstition, and not under the terrors which are often the result of great crimes, I know no idea so shocking as the idea of annihilation. The mind shrinks from it with horror.

It may, however, with some reason be objected, that, upon this hypothesis, all the wicked, though they differ materially in the degree of their wickedness, shall yet, without discrimination, incur the same degree of punishment. I admit the difficulty; but, in a matter so obscure, where is the system that is free from difficulties? Let my opponents, before they attempt to take the mote out of my eye, take the beam out of their own. When they consign the good to eternal bliss, and the wicked to everlasting damnation, with an immeasurable abyss between them; let them draw the line of demarcation where they please, such is the mixed character of mankind, that the least virtuous of the good who are rewarded, will differ very little indeed from the least culpable of the wicked that are punished. To this it is answered generally, that there will be different degrees of rewards and punishments: but this is a mere evasion of the question; for, certainly, he that shall enjoy the lowest degree of celestial bliss, will be removed

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at an immense distance of happiness from him who shall be scorched in the mildest manner in the flames of hell; and yet there can be but a very slight shade of difference in their respective merits.

To a man who takes a dispassionate survey of mankind, it will, perhaps, appear that the generality are deserving neither of great reward nor of heavy punishment. The majority seem to lead a kind of animal life. The man who earns his bread by hard work from morning to night, has little time for any occupations but what are immediately necessary to his existence; and this class constitutes the great mass of mankind. In more elevated stations, the woman who spends her mornings in shopping and gossipping, and her evenings at the ball or the card-table; with the idle man, as he is very justly called, who wastes his days in riding and lounging, and his nights in gambling or dissipation—among all these there will, undoubtedly, be some difference of temper and moral excellence, but, take them upon the whole, the object of their pursuits is much the same,—to pass their time in this world as pleasantly as they can, without much attention to the next; and making some exceptions for those few who are distinguished by superior depravity or conspicuous merit, (and neither the one nor the other is often met with in this class of beings,) the far greater number are insignificant, indeed, useless and unprofitable servants, but innocent and harmless; and though less excusable than those who are doomed to incessant toil, yet they are rather proper objects to be con-

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signed to eternal oblivion, than to be delivered to everlasting punishment.

It may be said, that however uniform the lives of the idle and the laborious may appear to a superficial observer, there are such discriminating features in their characters as may justly entitle some to infinite reward, and others to infinite punishment, though we, who cannot search into the hearts of men, may not be able to distinguish their respective merits. Be it so. But what is to become of children on this hypothesis, who die before they are conscious of the difference between good and evil? They have, certainly, done nothing to entitle them to reward; but are they, therefore, to incur eternal punishment, because they were cut off before they had an opportunity of qualifying themselves for a state of happiness? No, you will say; God will shew them mercy. But what mercy? If he receives them into Paradise, then that blessed state is not the reward of well-doing, since these infants have had no opportunity of doing any thing to entitle them to the smallest reward. And if the gates of paradise are open to all infants that die before the age at which they can be accounted moral agents, then the most charitable action a man could do would be, to take their life as soon as they are born, and thereby ensure their everlasting happiness, which must be of infinitely greater consequence to them than any blessings this world can afford.

Several texts of Scripture represent the punishment of sinners in the light of a mere exclusion from hap-

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piness. When the good and virtuous are assisting at the marriage feast, the wicked are shut out in outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Whether this weeping and gnashing of teeth proceeds from their being excluded from happiness, or owing to any additional sufferings, is not explained. In the same manner is the unprofitable servant (Matt. xxv. 30) excluded from the happiness enjoyed by his fellow servants, and cast into outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth: and the foolish virgins are represented as shut out and knocking in vain at the door for admittance.

Luke xiii. 28: "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out."

Here the weeping and gnashing of teeth are ascribed to their exclusion from happiness, not to positive suffering.

In 2 Thess. i. 9, the wicked are represented as "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power." This strongly favours the idea of absolute destruction or annihilation. So, likewise, 2 Pet. iii. 7, "the earth is reserved unto fire, against the day of judgment and *perdition* of ungodly men."

John v. 28. "All that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the *resurrection of life;* and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

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This only gives room to believe that both just and unjust shall rise; but damnation by no means ascertains the nature of the punishment of those that have done evil: and if the general resurrection is only a scenic representation, and every man receives his sentence immediately after his death, it only proves that all men shall be judged according to their merits.

Matt. xxv. 46: "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."

This is undoubtedly a strong text, and can only be explained on the consideration, that the total extinction and complete annihilation to which they were condemned was a punishment for their sins, which would continue for ever, and therefore be everlasting.

Matt. iii. 12: "He will gather his wheat into the garner, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

It appears evident to me, from this allusion to the husbandman who gathers his wheat and burns his chaff, that it was by no means the intention of the speaker to intimate the eternity of the punishment of the wicked. It certainly means the *destruction* of the chaff by fire; for, far from continuing in a state of combustion, nothing is so speedily consumed as chaff: the expression "unquenchable fire" only signifies that the fire will always be ready to consume the chaff, not that the chaff will burn to eternity; and only means that the sinner will

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as surely be destroyed as chaff is consumed by the flames.

So when Christ says, Matt. vii. 19, that "every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire," the obvious meaning is, that it is utterly destroyed.

Matt. xiii. 41: "The son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." And in ver. 49: "The angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire."

This expression is not inconsistent with the idea that they were to be destroyed by this furnace of fire, which is not only the most obvious construction, but is confirmed by the context. The wicked are compared, first, to tares which are gathered and burnt in the fire, and most certainly are destroyed:—the second comparison is this,—the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. This shews that the good were to be preserved; but as in the first comparison the tares were to be destroyed, and in the second the bad fish neglected and thrown away, the inference is, that the wicked, who are here typified, should likewise be destroyed and rooted out.

I do not think that the figurative expression of

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"their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched," which is taken from Isaiah, can at all allude to the eternity of punishment.

I do not cite any texts from the Revelation, which are too obscure to be understood: there, however, are some passages which favour the doctrine of fire and brimstone, where the devil and the wicked are to be tormented for ever. There are two resurrections mentioned; and it is altogether so dark and obscure, that I do not think we can draw any inference from it.

What in our translation is called Hell, is expressed in the original either by the word Ἅιδης, or Gehenna. The first only signifies the state of the dead, whether good or bad, happy or unhappy. Gehenna is an allusion to a place of that name at Jerusalem, where a fire was kept constantly burning, in which were thrown all the filth and impurities of the place, to be utterly consumed; and, as this fire was always kept up for that purpose, it might very properly be called the everlasting fire, or the fire that was never quenched,—for such is its proper meaning, and in the French Bibles it is translated, "le feu qui ne s'éteint point."

We find the same expression of eternal fire used in Scripture, where it cannot be possibly understood in the sense applied to it, as it relates to future punishments.

St. Jude, ver. 7, says, "Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire."

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In Jeremiah xvii. 27: "I will kindle a fire in the gates of Jerusalem, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem; and it shall not be quenched." And in the fourth verse of the same chapter he says, "it shall burn for ever."

This proves with what latitude we are to understand these strong expressions, which are here and there used as a threat against the Israelites, in the same manner as everlasting punishment against the wicked; the meaning, is in both cases, that the fire shall not be quenched till it has effected the purpose for which it was kindled.

There are two texts, which in my opinion, strongly confirm the view I have taken of the future state of mankind. The first is Matt. x. 28: "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

Here the obvious meaning is, an exhortation to fear him who can deprive men of life both in this world and the next, rather than those whose power extends only over the present life. The words imply the destruction of the whole man, body and soul, which is very different from an eternal existence in misery.

But we are told that it is to be destroyed in *Hell;* and as we have been taught to believe a state of everlasting suffering to be implied in the word Hell, we are led to give an explanation of the word *destroy*, which is certainly very different from its natural meaning. But if we understand the word *Hell* in

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the sense which I conceive to be the true one, then this passage is clear and consistent, and signifies that the soul of the wicked man, as well as his body, shall be destroyed at his death.

The second text is, John iii. 16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not *perish*, but have everlasting life."

Here the advantage derived from the mission of Christ is evidently stated in the strongest terms: and what does it amount to? Not that man should be delivered from eternal punishment, but that he should not perish—that he should not be destroyed as he would otherwise have been. Christ could deliver the repentant sinner only from that state and from those evils which he would otherwise have incurred, and that was the sentence pronounced against Adam, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return;" which certainly conveys no idea of eternal punishment. In both these texts the future happiness of the virtuous is opposed and contrasted, not by the eternal sufferings of the wicked, but by their destruction. In the first, we are told that the wicked shall be destroyed; in the second, that the virtuous shall not perish, but be saved from that destruction which will be the fate of others.

One of the greatest objections to this hypothesis is derived from the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, where the former is represented as in a state of torment; and though it is only a parable, yet it is

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not easy to account for the introduction of an erroneous representation of so material a point. This parable is certainly one of the most disheartening accounts of our future expectations to be found in the Gospel. The rich man, who is sent to a place of torment, is not accused of any sin or particular vice; he is represented merely as a luxurious man, who enjoyed his fortune, was fond of pomp and good living; but he is not accused of injustice, extortion, or even uncharitableness. Lazarus, to be sure, was at his gate, and wishing to be fed from the crumbs that fell from his table; nor is it said that these were refused. In all probability, the rich man enjoyed himself at his convivial board without troubling himself about Lazarus, or even knowing that he was at his door: and what rich man disturbs his festivity with the thoughts of the beggars who may be at his gate? Yet this man is sent to a place of torment, and, by way of reconciling him to his situation, or at least to shew him the justice of his sentence, he is told, that as he was happy during life, and Lazarus miserable, it is right that they should now change conditions, that each might be happy in his turn. No other reason is alleged for his present sufferings, except his having been happy before. A strict interpretation of this parable would lead us to the unavoidable inference, that it is an unpardonable sin in a rich man to indulge himself in expensive amusements and luxurious enjoyments, while many of his fellow-creatures are destitute of the necessaries of life.

It may, however, be alleged with some appearance

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of reason, that, as parables and apologues are designed to make a forcible impression on the mind, they may be sometimes painted in figures larger than life, and conveyed in language that will not bear a literal interpretation. To a certain degree, the observation may be just; we must, however, be careful not to carry it too far: for although, when we take a view of the manners, the customs, and the ideas that prevail in the world, it may appear to be a hard saying, that the man is highly criminal who lays out his revenues in the elegancies, the superfluities, the luxuries, and splendour of this world, while thousands of his fellow-mortals are living around him in a state of absolute destitution; perhaps it will appear, on mature consideration, that this judgment is rather founded on habits, on example, and, I may say, on prescription, than on reason or justice. This has been so much the established custom, not in one but in all countries, that it is almost considered to be a natural distinction, and that the rich and the poor are beings as different in their nature as they are in their habits; that some are born for enjoyment, others for suffering; and that it is the province of the latter to administer to the convenience, the happiness, and superfluities of the former.

Even the indulgent morality, however, of this age of selfish gratification would strongly reprobate, and hold in merited detestation, the conduct of the man who should indulge part of his family in every kind of luxury and expensive enjoyments, while he suffered another part to languish in poverty and want. Now

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every community is nothing more than a large family, in which we find a few in a state of affluence, able to gratify every wish and every caprice, while a great number are destitute of the comforts, and some even without the necessaries of life. Can those men, then, be innocent, who squander away in capricious luxuries, in vain ostentation, and empty magnificence, sums, which, if duly applied, would be more than adequate to the relief of the wants of their destitute and suffering brethren? Is not the rich man, who riots in luxury, and wastes his substance in the gratification of his vanity or sensuality, regardless of the wants, the infirmities, and the helpless condition of his poor neighbours, deficient in that first of all the virtues, Christian charity, or, to use the language even of those who reject Christianity, of benevolence and philanthropy? But so far from endeavouring to raise the poor as much as possible from their miserable and degraded state, it is the study of the rich to widen as much as they can the distance, already too great, which fortune has placed between them; and profuse and extravagant as they may be in the gratification of their appetites, yet the sums wasted to satisfy and pamper them are insignificant in comparison with those that are lavished to gratify their vanity by an ostentatious display of wealth and magnificence, that they may be more effectually distinguished and separated from the vulgar, and appear like beings of a superior order. This, surely, is a spirit of arrogant superiority, not more inconsistent with the meekness of the Christian than the morality

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of the philosopher, who is as loud as the divine in his declamations on the natural equality of mankind, and on the little intrinsic value of the adventitious distinctions of rank and fortune. The opulent man, therefore, who consults merely his own gratifications, regardless of the miserable objects that surround him, stands condemned, not only by the precepts of the Gospel, but by the dictates of philosophy and the reason and feelings of mankind.

We must not, however, carry even our benevolent propensities to an extreme, nor hold it out as proper or reasonable that a rich man should be obliged to maintain a poor man who is too idle to work for his maintenance. This would not only be too heavy a tax on the opulent, but prove ultimately injurious to the poor themselves, as it would remove the strongest motive to virtuous industry, by which numbers are raised from poverty to affluence; and, by promoting an universal spirit of idleness, sloth, and dependency, ultimately reduce the rich themselves to a state of penury. While property remains so unequally divided as it is at present in every nation of Europe, it is a certain truth that the poor are indebted for their livelihood to the luxury of the rich, which is the chief spur to their industry and the first foundation of their independence. I have no doubt, at the same time, that a more equal distribution of property would create more substantial happiness, and also be more conducive to morality, though perhaps it might be attended with less wealth and splendour, and that false glare which is so errone-

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ously denominated national prosperity. But to discuss this point, even in the most superficial manner, would alone require a volume. In the mean time, without denying the beneficial effects, on a general scale, of the luxury of the rich, there will always remain many occasions on which they may and ought to relieve the infirmities of the destitute and helpless.

This, however, is foreign to my subject, and I acknowledge that, though only a parable, a presumption at least may be drawn from the sufferings of the rich man, that the wicked shall undergo some punishment. Whether this single passage is sufficient to establish that doctrine I very much doubt: it cannot, at any rate, be brought as an evidence for the *eternity* of punishment, for there is not a word said about its duration. If the wicked are not utterly destroyed, (which I own appears to me, upon the whole the most probable opinion,) I should incline to the opinion that their punishment will principally consist in their exclusion from a state of happiness, and some positive afflictions annexed to their situation, to which either use may reconcile them or from which repentance may at last release them, and ultimately obtain their pardon and some degree of happiness. But a state of exquisite torment for ever and ever cannot be reconciled to our ideas of a just and benevolent Providence: and if the wicked are not utterly destroyed and annihilated, we must hope and believe that they will ultimately, after undergoing some previous punishment, be placed in a state of tolerable ease and comfort. This may be

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done either by a change in their situation, or by rendering that situation easy and even pleasant by habit and custom, which at the beginning was grievous and unhappy.

It must, however, be considered, that on such subjects as these we can only see through a glass darkly: we can know no more than is revealed to us. But, even though we should admit everlasting destruction or annihilation to be the fate destined to the greatest sinners, there is no improbability in the supposition that those who are less guilty may meet with greater indulgence, and, after some corrective punishment, be admitted into the mansions of the blessed, or placed in some other state of less felicity, or be otherwise disposed of in such a manner as God in his providence may order, and which our ignorance cannot foresee.

Samuel Bourne has an excellent discourse on this subject in one of the volumes of his sermons, which ought to be read by every Christian. His idea seems to be, that sinners shall be punished more or less severely, according to their demerits, before they are finally destroyed. But I do not see what beneficial effects can result from punishments which cannot by their correction improve the being on whom they are inflicted; nor, as far as we can perceive, operate as an example to others after the consummation of all things. Such is my reliance on the goodness and benevolence of the Supreme Being, that I feel inclined to admit of any interpretation which tends to

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mitigate rather than one that aggravates the dreadful sentence of eternal destruction which is to be passed on sinners.

Matt. xvi. 28: "Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom."

The interpretation given by Bishop Horsley of this text is to me astonishing: and what surprises me still more is, that the same view was entertained by so sober and enlightened a commentator as Dr. Samuel Clarke. The Bishop understands by this passage, that at the second coming of Christ the wicked shall be condemned to eternal sufferings so intense, that their natural death and whatever they may have endured in their intermediate state, will appear to them in comparison so light and trivial, that they may be said not to taste of death; that is, not to experience its bitterness and severity till the consummation of their misery takes place at the final judgment of mankind. If such fanciful expositions are to be admitted, Scripture may be made to signify anything which may be necessary to support the system of the expositor, and its plain and obvious meaning will be lost. In that case, not only the vulgar, but the most learned ought not to read the Scriptures without a commentator by his side; and the commentator ought to be inspired as well as the Scripture. In my opinion, the reverend prelate's interpretation is totally at variance with the context.

1. It is clear that this passage refers not to the na-

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ture or degree of punishment to be inflicted on the wicked, but merely to the *time* of the coming of Christ, whatever may be meant by that coming, and signifies that it should happen during the life-time of some of those that were present—Jesus is here speaking to his disciples, not denouncing curses on the wicked.

2. He says that SOME shall not taste of death, which implies that others should, and cannot be reconciled to the doctrine that *none* shall taste the bitterness of death till the resurrection and the coming of Christ.

3. It appears to me to be exactly similar to the xxiv. chap. 34 ver. "Verily, I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."

The time when the next life is to begin is a matter of much controversy and equal uncertainty. The common opinion is, that after death the soul will remain in a kind of imperfect happiness or misery till the resurrection, when the happiness or misery of body and soul united will be complete. This opinion, I think, is not to be maintained. The manner in which divines argue on this point is, indeed, truly curious. They tell us that the body, while we live, is a clog to the soul; and afterwards they say that the soul, when separated from the body, will remain in an imperfect state, a kind of half-existence, till it is re-united to that clog which was said to check and impede its native energies. Every idea of an intermediate state is to me entirely unsatisfactory. If the

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soul is judged and its fate determined immediately after death, the last judgment would be absolutely nugatory; it would be a judgment upon those who were already condemned or acquitted. We must either believe that, if man enters into another life immediately after the expiration of the present, his judgment takes place at once; that this is what the Scripture means by the last day and the resurrection; and that there will be neither a universal judgment nor a resurrection of the identical body that was buried in the ground; or we must believe that the existence of man, soul and body, whatever you may call it, will be suspended till the day of judgment and the resurrection. But whether by resurrection is meant the rising of the body that was buried, or the resurrection of the same intelligent being only, is not very clear.

Having given up the intermediate state as totally unsupported either by reason or scripture, the only question that remains is, whether men shall enter into a state of reward and punishment immediately after death, or remain in a state of insensibility till the last judgment. On the former hypothesis, both will take place with respect to each individual at the moment of his dissolution. As what is an argument in favour of one of these systems, is an objection to the other, and *vice versâ* they must be both considered at one view. But it is necessary to divest ourselves of all preconceived notions respecting the materiality or spirituality of the soul, by which our minds are too apt to be prejudiced. If the soul is spiritual, still the Being who made it can either

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suspend or totally annihilate its functions; and though it should depend on the organization of the body, or be, as it were, the spring that sets it in motion, still it may be transferred to another substance or body without losing its individuality. We do not, indeed, know in what manner; but it is no more incomprehensible than the resurrection of the same body that is dissolved, and the re-union of its organs.

It must be acknowledged, that all the intimations we have in Scripture of a future life are intimately connected with and made to depend on the resurrection, the universal judgment, and the last day,—the coming and appearing of Christ. But it is answered, that when a general resurrection and judgment are mentioned, it is with a view of exhibiting a magnificent scenic representation of what will happen separately to each individual: and that though, in their literal sense, such passages are indicative of an universal judgment, when all mankind shall rise up at once after a long sleep, yet, as they may be taken in a figurative sense, they are not decisive of the question.

Thus, when it is said, John v. 28, that "the hour is coming when all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth," it may be contended that by the phrase, *all that are in the graves,* may simply be understood *the dead,* and that they may hear his voice and come forth, either at the general resurrection, or on their own resuscitation immediately after their dissolution. On this supposition, to every individual the day of his death is the last

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day, the coming of Christ; in consequence of which he is restored to life and brought immediately to judgment. 1 Thess. iv. 13 et seq., though perhaps capable of another interpretation, strongly corroborates this opinion; and so do the texts in which the coming of Christ is represented as being near at hand.

But, on the other hand, there are some passages which seem irreconcilable with any such supposition. The famous text, "of that day knoweth no man, &c. but the Father," can be understood only of the day of judgment, when the fate of all mankind shall be finally decided: it cannot relate to the day of each man's death and judgment, which, on that system, must be the daily and natural course of things; it evidently relates to the end of the world, which must be of little consequence to the generality of mankind, if their destination is fixed immediately on their departure from this life.

2 Tim. iv. 1: "The Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing," cannot easily be construed to refer to any thing but one general judgment.

The resurrection of Lazarus appears to me a strong objection both to the intermediate state and the immediate restoration of man. Had his soul been in a conscious state, he must have been able to decide the question by his own experience; and as he is represented to have been a good man, it would have been no kindness to bring him back from a state of perfect happiness to the cares and troubles

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of this mortal life, which must have proved doubly irksome to him after he had been initiated into the joys of eternal felicity. If it is said, that as he was to be resuscitated, he was continued in a state different from others, the miracle is frittered away to nothing: for, on that supposition, Lazarus was not dead, but only in a trance or lethargy.

Another material observation is this: if the restoration of mankind to life and immortality depended on the sufferings and obedience of Christ, and was the reward given him in consequence of them, it is evident that the resurrection or restoration of men to life could not have taken place before his coming into this world; and all those that died before that event could not have been restored to life immediately on their dissolution: and this view is confirmed by John xiv. 2, 3: "I go to prepare a place for you, and I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am ye may be also." But any preparation would have been useless if men were already transferred into another life at the moment of losing this.

The doctrine of an universal judgment is not affected by the question whether the same physical body which was buried shall be raised again, or whether the spirit, breath, or life, or soul of the individual shall be transferred to another and more glorious habitation: but the resurrection of the same identical body is totally inconsistent with the supposition that the final judgment takes place immediately after death: the resurrection of the body is, however,

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not mentioned any where in Scripture, except very obscurely in the Revelation: and, allowing for the highly figurative expressions used in that book, we may fairly admit, that, when the grave and the sea are said to give up their dead, the meaning is, that all those that have been buried in the earth, or drowned in the waters, shall rise, without assuming that they shall appear in the same identical bodies they were clothed in when they died.

The manner of the resurrection is not very clearly explained by St. Paul, the difficulties being resolved chiefly by the power of God; and it is highly probable that St. Paul himself did not know the manner in which it would take place. If Christ himself was ignorant of the time when, St. Paul might be equally ignorant of the manner how, it should be brought about; but his argument is certainly adverse to the resurrection of the same body. 1 Cor. xv. 42: "It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption," &c.; and verse 50, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." And ver. 51: "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, at the last trump!" If even those who are alive at the last day must undergo such transformation, what would be the use of collecting all the particles which composed our mortal body, when immediately after they must undergo a total transmutation?

It must be admitted, that the idea that every man shall, immediately after his death, enter into the

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state of his final destination, is more agreeable to the general economy of nature than the supposition that existence should be so long suspended, and that the whole should at last be concluded by an universal instantaneous resurrection and judgment: nature certainly acts in a more silent, progressive, and unostentatious manner.

The interval between death and the resurrection is likewise revolting to our feelings, as it gives the idea of a long though temporary annihilation. It is, indeed, very philosophically argued, that as we shall be void of consciousness all that time, the hour of our death and that of our resurrection will appear to be coincident, and to follow one another without interruption. But, in spite of philosophy, we cannot but consider ten thousand years as a very long sleep; and I believe there is no man who would not prefer a certainty of happiness to take place immediately on his dissolution to one that should not commence till after the lapse of several thousand years.

The question, however, is not to be decided merely by our wishes, and, upon the whole, it appears to me that the general tenor of Scripture is strongly in favour of a resurrection and judgment to take place at the end of the world, when all the dead shall be raised from a state of insensibility. There are not, however, wanting objections to this system; and though the texts in favour of an immediate judgment are neither so numerous nor so clear as those adduced in proof of a general resurrection, yet there are some which are deserving of consideration.

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Luke xx. 38: "For He is not a God of the dead, but of the living."

It would be tedious to enter into an examination of the arguments used to reconcile this with the supposed state of death or immortality of the patriarchs; they may be just, but I cannot say they carry conviction to my mind.

The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is one of the sheet-anchors of this system. It is, indeed, only a parable; but it must have been intended to convey some instruction, and it certainly seems to intimate that Abraham, the Rich Man, and Lazarus, were all in a state of consciousness: it is not conclusive, I allow; but it affords a strong presumption. The objection Law makes to it, that the Rich Man is represented as having a body, is a good argument against the intermediate state to which he applies it, but is of no weight if urged against his final destination, as, in that case, he would have been clothed with a new body.

The promise of our Saviour to the thief on the cross, "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise," is another text justly alleged in support of that opinion. To this it has been, as it appears to me, very unsatisfactorily answered, that *to-day* alluded to the time the promise was made, and not to the time when it should be fulfilled. I am surprised to find such trifling in a work of Dr. Priestley's; and am still more astonished that he should suppose that by Paradise might, perhaps, be meant the unconscious state of the virtuous dead. If the state of the

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dead were unconscious, what difference could there be between the state of the virtuous dead and that of the sinful? When the Jews, as he observes, divided the state of the dead into Paradise and Gehenna, they certainly never considered that to be an unconscious state. The only way to explain this passage in such a manner as to render it consistent with the insensibility of the whole man till the resurrection, is to suppose that to-day is not to be understood strictly, but that it is to be construed in the same manner as the threat to Adam, that on the day on which he ate the fruit he should die; which only meant that his death should be certain; and that so the promise to the thief was intended merely to signify the certainty of his going to Paradise, without ascertaining the same.

Upon the whole, whether men shall be restored to consciousness and receive their final sentence immediately after their decease, or whether they are to remain in a state of insensibility till the day of judgment, are questions which I feel myself by no means competent to decide: but it appears to me that one or the other must necessarily take place; that there can be no medium in the case; and that the intermediate state which was intended to reconcile those two opinions elucidates nothing, and is attended with additional difficulties; for if the fate of man is decided at the time of his dissolution, the last judgment dwindles into a mere piece of formality, or rather, according to a vulgar expression, is like hanging a man first and trying him afterwards.

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It evidently appears that it was not the design of God to give us a clear and certain knowledge of the time or the manner in which we should be punished and rewarded hereafter; it is, therefore, rash and presumptuous to pretend to discover what he has determined we should not know. It deserves, however, I think, some commendation to endeavour to explain what communications he has been pleased to make, in such a manner as to reconcile them to his justice and goodness, and to the qualities which both reason and revelation have taught us to attribute to him.

We may not know when our trial is to take place; we may be ignorant of the circumstances that will attend it; whether the wicked shall be consigned to utter destruction—whether they shall, after due punishment and correction, be admitted to some degree of felicity, or continue in a state which, compared to the happiness of the virtuous, may be called punishment: but, while we acknowledge a good and merciful God, we can never believe that he has created so many beings to make them eternally miserable. The accounts we have in Scripture of the dispensation are too dark, obscure, and uncertain, to support the conclusions which have been drawn from them; and the plainest expressions would be insufficient to convince us of the truth of a doctrine so utterly at variance with our ideas of a benevolent and merciful Creator. The restoration of man to immortality is always represented as a universal blessing; which would be far from being the case if—I

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will not say the greater part—but a considerable portion of mankind were condemned to everlasting torments.

Yet such is the doctrine admitted, enforced, and endeavoured to be justified by almost every Christian church. And who are the unhappy beings that are to be consigned to this place of everlasting torment and eternal sufferings? Those who do not believe in the real presence, says the Catholic—those who do not believe the divinity of Christ and a Trinity in unity, says the Trinitarian—those whose name God has not thought proper to insert among the elect, says the Predestinarian. When the mercies of a Being of infinite goodness and benevolence are represented in this light, are we to be surprised if the faith of the candid inquirer after truth is staggered, and revolts at a doctrine so repugnant to his feelings, so irreconcileable with every notion of the goodness and equity of the Supreme Being? and is not God more honoured by the doubts of such a man than by the sturdy faith of more orthodox believers?

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CHAPTER VII.

ON GRACE.

Having endeavoured, in the preceding pages, to explain the nature of faith and atonement in a manner consistent with reason and Scripture, and attempted to prove that the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, and the personality of the Holy Ghost, are not the doctrines of the Gospel, but the inventions of men; and that the revelations concerning a future state do not ascertain the time of our judgment, nor disclose to us the nature or duration of the state to which the wicked are doomed in terms sufficiently clear and explicit to warrant the doctrine of eternal punishments; if I have been in any degree successful in the task I have undertaken, I think I have obviated the strongest objections urged against the reasonableness of Christianity.

The remaining objections are levelled against points of less importance, and more obviously the corruptions of men.

Among these the doctrines respecting Grace deserve particular attention, as they have given room for as many false notions and acrimonious disputes as any of the contested points in Christianity.

The divine grace has been supposed to mean, a

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mysterious operation of God without the agency of man, by which he is elected to a state of future happiness.

All men being supposed to be involved in the guilt as well as in the consequences of Adam's transgression, and to be so universally tainted with this original sin, that it was impossible for them to conceive a good thought or perform a virtuous action, they would all have been consigned to eternal misery if God had not been pleased to except a few from the general doom, and by a peculiar grace or favour enabled them to please him in spite of their original sin, and predestinated them to a state of happiness.

This doctrine of predestination, by which some are arbitrarily elected to happiness, and others reproved and consigned to eternal misery, is one which saps the foundation of all religion and morality. For if our future destination depends on the arbitrary will of another, and not on our own exertions, there is an end to all arguments in favour of virtue, as well as of every motive to practise it. All we can say to such preachers is, if my fate depends on predestination, for heaven's sake hold your tongue, and let me go on my own way, since if there is any truth in your doctrine, neither what all your eloquence can urge nor the utmost I can do can possibly change the immutable decrees of God. If I am irrevocably predestinated to misery in the next world, what advantage can I derive from piety or virtue? All I have to do is, to submit to the fate destined for me hereafter, and make myself as happy in this world as I can.

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Many, however, who do not admit the doctrines either of original sin or predestination in their full extent, are still of opinion that the grace or spirit of God operates in a miraculous though insensible manner on the mind of man, and that its co-operation with his otherwise imperfect endeavours is necessary to render his humble efforts acceptable to God. But is it reconcileable to reason or our ideas of divine goodness that God should require of us what we are unable to perform without preternatural assistance? It may be said, God will grant it to those who are sincerely desirous and worthy of it. This, however, amounts to nothing unless it implies a contradiction. For how can they render themselves worthy of it, if they can do nothing good or acceptable without it? If they can render themselves worthy of it by their own efforts, it shews that a man may do what is right without and independent of it. On this hypothesis, nothing good can be done without it, and yet it shall only be given to those who have proved themselves worthy of it by their previous good disposition, of which they are incapable without it.

The grace of God is nothing more than the favour of God. As far as his favour is confined to those that are virtuous, it implies virtue in those that are the objects of it: but the grace of God is the consequence of their virtue, and not their virtue of his grace,—I mean when applied to individuals. For the grace of God, like the love of God, is often used to express his goodness towards all mankind, and more particularly the favour he has shewn the world in the

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dispensations revealed in the Gospel. Our salvation or future happiness is justly called the grace of God, because it is a gift or favour granted to those who choose to comply with the conditions on which it is offered. But it is not a grace conferred in an arbitrary and capricious manner by the election of one man and the reprobation of another. Grace is sometimes used for pardon, not only in Scripture, but in common conversation. In the times of the Apostles, as extraordinary spiritual powers were often bestowed, so it is not improbable that supernatural assistance was given them, which might be well called a peculiar grace or favour.

As we are totally dependent on the providence of God, it may in some sense be said that we cannot work out our own salvation without his grace or assistance, any more than we can succeed in the ordinary concerns of life without his favour or permission. We often say that he has been pleased to bless us in our endeavours to obtain worldly prosperity, as well as in our spiritual efforts to become righteous—for in him we live and move and have our being; and I have no doubt that there is no more immediate agency in the one case than in the other.

Having thus, to the best of my ability, disencumbered what I conceive to be genuine Christianity from the corruptions, additions, and inventions with which, in a long course of ages, it has been disfigured and obscured, I flatter myself I have in a great measure obviated the principal objections urged against it by

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unbelievers, whose most powerful arguments I have always found to be levelled rather against its credibility and reasonableness than against its evidence.

It must be acknowledged, that there are some positions too absurd and contradictory to be established by any testimony whatever. It is, therefore, a most material point to prove that Christianity, properly understood, contains no position of this nature, whatever may be the representations of those who have presumed to place their own conjectures and conclusions on a level with divine revelation.

The sum of Christianity may, in my opinion, be reduced to a belief, that Christ was sent from God to reveal his will to mankind, and to bring life and immortality to light—to declare the certainty of a future state—and to teach us how we may secure to ourselves a happy existence for ever. If in consequence of such a belief we avail ourselves of this revelation, by regulating our conduct in such a manner as to entitle us to the rewards which are promised to the good, we are every thing, both in faith and practice, that can be required of Christians; and as the Rev. T. Balguy* observes, it will never be laid to our charge, that we have misconceived certain metaphysical niceties which have been drawn from obscure passages of Scripture by the magical operation of Pagan philosophy.

* Charge I.

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CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE HISTORICAL EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY.

HAVING endeavoured to shew, in the preceding chapters, that the tenets which have occasioned the strongest objections against Christianity are no part of its genuine doctrines, I shall now proceed to examine the proofs on which its credibility depends.

It is not pretended that the truth of Christianity is of a nature that will admit of demonstration: it is founded chiefly on existing facts, on internal evidence, and on historical testimony. It is by an examination of its origin, its progress, and present condition, that we can judge of its claims to our belief. It is not a simple, but a complicated question, the investigation of which requires the greatest care and attention.

The following propositions will, perhaps, be of considerable use in conducting the inquiry:—

I. That Christianity was founded on and originated in those facts and circumstances, whether true or false, which are now held out to us as the foundation of our faith.

II. That the first Christians had ample opportunities of ascertaining whether these facts were true or false.

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III. That Chistianity was promulgated by ignorant and illiterate men, of low condition, who could have no personal influence on their hearers, and must derive their whole importance from the weight and evidence of their doctrines, instead of giving them any consequence from their character or station.

IV. That men so ignorant and uninformed could not, morally speaking, have invented, without superior aid and assistance, a system of morals and theology which is superior to any which the wisest philosophers had ever imagined.

I. Christianity was founded and originated in those facts and circumstances, whether true or false, which are now held out to us as the foundation of our faith.

There is the strongest historical evidence that the several books of the New Testament were written by the persons whose names they bear.

From the earliest accounts we have of the origin and progress of Christianity, we find them acknowledged, quoted, and appealed to, as works of undoubted authority, and as the productions of the writers to whom we ascribe them. All the different sects received them, with a few exceptions, and appealed to them in support of their respective systems. Innumerable copies were dispersed throughout the world, and they were translated into a variety of languages, and manuscripts of great antiquity are still extant. They were early collected into one volume, and preserved with great care in the several churches of the Christian world, being always looked

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up to with respect and veneration as the foundation of their faith, the rule of their conduct, and the law by which all controversies or differences of opinion were to be decided.

It is not within the scope of these observations to enter into the mass of evidence which might be produced in support of the authenticity of the Scriptures; neither am I equal to the task: the subject has been investigated by Dr. Lardner with great learning and industry, and Paley has given a clear and compendious view of the general argument.

I do not see that the genuineness of any writings is established on better grounds than that of the Gospels and St. Paul's Epistles. Still it may be urged, that the strongest evidence of this nature can amount only to a high degree of probability. Allowing, therefore, for the sake of argument, that the books which are transmitted to us under the name of Matthew, John, Paul, &c., may have been the productions of other persons, and attributed to the apostles to give them more weight and credit, still it must be admitted that they were written at the time, or very soon after the first progress of Christianity, and for this I shall only assign two reasons:—

1. The material evidence arising from the minute specification of names, time, place, and local circumstances, which could only be noticed by men who wrote at the time when the events were recent; as well as the allusion to several occurrences which are rather hinted at than explained, and which in many places, especially in St. Paul's epistles, throw

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an obscurity over several parts of his writings, which it is not always easy to elucidate.

2. Because all these writings are alluded to, quoted, and discussed, by the earliest fathers, some of whom were contemporary with the apostles; so that they must have been written in the first age of Christianity.

But though it be allowed that books under the same name as those transmitted to us were extant at that time, and that they might contain many passages which now make part of our bible, still it may be objected that it does not necessarily follow that those ancient books contained every thing we find in our own Scriptures, and nothing besides; or, in other words, it is not impossible that these books may have undergone many alterations, and that though, from the very beginning of Christianity, there might be Gospels of St. Matthew, St. John, &c., it is not certain that they were exactly the same as those which we now receive under the same names. Though this is merely the suggestion of a bare possibility, totally unsupported by proof, yet I am willing to allow the objection its utmost weight; but still I think that the argument I mean to urge in favour of Revelation will nevertheless remain in full force, as it stands on the evidence of facts not to be controverted or explained away.

Christianity is in existence at the present day,—it has been for many ages the established religion of the greatest part of civilized Europe,—it originated at or near the time and at the place specified in the

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sacred writings;—these are facts, about which I apprehend there will be no dispute.

It is equally certain that, as far back as Christianity can be traced, its essential doctrines have ever been the same as those which at the present day form the grounds of our belief.

That Jesus Christ was sent by the Almighty to announce the doctrine of a future state, and to exhort men by repentance and amendment of life to ensure their salvation—that he proved his divine mission by a long series of miracles—that after being crucified and buried he rose from the dead—and that he then commissioned the Apostles to preach the Gospel to all nations, and enabled them to work miracles in attestation of their divine Commission: these, which have been held by all sects down to the present time as fundamental truths of Christianity, these are the grounds, true or false, real or pretended, on which Christianity was originally founded.

This being the case, even if we were to admit that the books of the New Testament were not written by those persons to whom they have always been attributed, and that the date of their original promulgation were obscure and uncertain; and even that they might have been corrupted, and have suffered material alterations,—all which suppositions are in the highest degree improbable—still the important and material fact would remain indisputable,—that the fundamental doctrines on which Christianity was established were substantially the same as those which are universally received among Christians to this day.

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II. As it is incontrovertible that Christianity took its rise about the time when these facts, real or pretended, were recent, it follows that the first Christians had an opportunity of inquiring into the truth of them.

Events so incredible, promulgated by men without influence or education, could not be universally received, merely on their individual authority. It was as easy as it was natural for those to whom this new religion was addressed, to inquire whether such a man as Jesus ever existed, whether he went about preaching the doctrine that was proposed to them, whether he was crucified, and afterwards rose from the dead. The existence of Jesus, his preaching, and his death, were facts which could easily be ascertained, and which, if found not to be true, must overthrow the new religion at once. The crucifixion is represented to have taken place at the feast of the Passover, when the whole population of Judea was, in a manner, present at Jerusalem: this, at least, could not have been a fiction: had it been so, any other place than Jerusalem, and any other time than the Passover, would have been chosen for the scene of action.

The truth of the miracles and of the resurrection it would, perhaps, be more difficult to ascertain. But as the former were performed in the sight of multitudes, and the latter, though less public, was seen by many witnesses, they were not incapable of proof.

And although the Gentiles had not the same op-

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portunities of examining into the truth of these facts, yet they received their accounts from eye-witnesses, whose testimony, uniform and consistent in itself, was corroborated by the miracles which they were enabled to work. The extraordinary gifts which were exercised by the apostles, were not only an attestation of their own veracity, but likewise a strong indirect confirmation of the miracles of their Lord, by whom such power had been conferred on them.

Miracles require particular consideration. Divines are accused of reasoning in a circle—at one time proving the doctrine by the miracles, and at others the miracles by the doctrine. The objection is not well founded; for it is to be observed that miracles are to be considered in a twofold light; first, as they are proofs and confirmations of the divine mission of Christ; and, secondly, as they are objections to the truth of the Revelation transmitted to us. To the first Christians, to the apostles and disciples who were eye-witnesses of them, and were convinced of their reality, they were evident proofs of the supernatural powers of Christ, whence they might deduce the necessary inference that he was sent from God and was the promised Messiah; and to all those who believe in Christianity, they must appear in the same light. But with respect to those who refuse their assent to the Scriptures, the case is widely different; instead of proving the doctrines, the miracles are the great difficulty to be surmounted.

For this reason it appears to me that miracles

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ought to be adduced with great caution as evidences of the truth of Christianity: they are a part—a very essential part—of the revelation itself; but as they are the most questionable of all the facts submitted to our belief, they cannot be taken for granted without evidence proportionably strong.

It is true that, when once miracles are established, there can no longer be a doubt of the divine origin of the revelation which they attest, and therefore the miraculous powers of Jesus were originally the strongest proofs of his divine mission. But as they at that time proved the doctrine to be divine, so now they must, in a great measure, derive their credibility from the doctrine itself, and from the other evidences by which the truth of the gospel is established. To urge the miracles, in *the first instance,* to an unbeliever, as evidences of the truth of Christianity, is to begin at the wrong end; and he may fairly reply, That what you insist upon as proofs, are the very things which require to be proved, and which it is the most difficult to believe.

To deny the possibility, or, at least, the credibility, of miracles in all cases, appears to me to be equally weak and presumptuous. It is said that a miracle contradicts experience. But what experience? If a man's individual experience, it is trifling and absurd. It is making one man's ignorance the judge of the wisdom of others. On this principle, a child of ten years old would be justified in disbelieving what he is told by his tutor, because contrary to his juvenile experience. If a man is to believe any thing

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beyond his own experience, he must believe it on the testimony of others; and here the principle is evidently abandoned, and the question will rest on the value and weight of the testimony on which any fact is to be believed. If no fact is to be believed that does not fall within a man's limited experience and confined knowledge, the best established truths will be doubted or denied; and the moment a fact is admitted on the knowledge or experience of others, it must rest for its foundation on human testimony or historical evidence. On Mr. Hume's principle, as he himself acknowledges, the inhabitant of the torrid zone, who should refuse to believe the congelation of water, would act rationally; and yet he certainly would form an erroneous judgment. And on the same principle, the man who should disbelieve the power of the loadstone to attract iron, or that the needle invariably points to the north, would argue philosophically, if he was so situated that he could not have recourse to actual experiment.

But, it is urged, no fact is to be admitted which is against the laws of nature. Define, then, those laws of nature, and prove that they have always been uniform and without any interruption. According to these laws, the earth, in its regular and insensible rotation around the sun, appears to us quiescent, stable, and immoveable. This state of quiescence is, however, frequently interrupted by earthquakes. This is to us a fact so well established, that no man in England of common information entertains any more doubts of the earthquake of Lisbon than he

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does of the great fire of London. Would a man who inhabited a country not subject to these violent interruptions of what he had always considered to be the laws of nature, and who had never heard of such phenomena, be justified in disbelieving the accounts of earthquakes that he might receive from other quarters of the globe?

It cannot, indeed, be denied that the Being who established may also suspend or alter the laws of nature. But as such a suspension or alteration is contrary to our experience, it requires the clearest evidence to convince us that it has really taken place. And for this reason, when it is urged, as has been sometimes done, but in my opinion very injudiciously, that Christianity is as well supported by evidence as any part of ancient history, it must be observed, that something more than what would be sufficient to attest an ordinary occurrence is requisite in the case of a miracle.

If a person of common veracity should tell me that he has met a man in the street whom I know to be living in the neighbourhood, I should have no hesitation in believing what he said; but if the same man should tell me that he met, at the same time, another of my acquaintance whom I know to be in India, or to have been dead for some time, I certainly should conclude, not that my friend was miraculously conveyed from the East, or risen from the dead, but that the relator had either been deceived himself, or that he wished to deceive me.

In our judgment of ancient history we proceed on the same principle. Some critics reject the first 500

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years of the Roman history as entirely fabulous; others, admitting the leading facts to be true, very judiciously withhold their assent from all the prodigies with which Livy has embellished or disfigured that part of his narrative. We may very consistently believe that such a man as Tarquin existed, without being convinced that he cut a flint with a razor. Ancient history is no matter of faith, and every judicious reader will peruse it with discrimination, rejecting those parts which appear unworthy of credit, even though at the same time he assents to other portions of the same narrative resting on the same authority.

The case is widely different with respect to Christianity, which owes its very foundation to the supernatural interposition of the Deity; and therefore unless we believe the miracles, we must necessarily reject the revelation altogether. If this part of the story is not true,—if Christ possessed no powers beyond other men,—if after his crucifixion he remained buried in the grave, without rising from the dead,—if the Apostles were not endowed with miraculous powers, the Gospel history is nothing more than a romance.

In order to render miracles credible to us, who only receive them on the testimony of men, which must be allowed not to be infallible, it is necessary to shew that there was a *dignus vindice nodus,* that they were performed to answer mighty and important purposes. If we were told as an isolated fact, unaccompanied with any circumstances, and unattended with any consequences that could account

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for this apparent violation of the laws of nature, that a man was risen from the dead, however credible the testimony on which we received it, we should very rationally withhold our assent. In like manner, if the miracles recorded in the sacred books were presented to us in the same naked unconnected state, we should be justified in viewing them with distrust; but if it can be proved to us that they were worthy the wisdom of divine providence, to establish a new dispensation tending to the happiness of man, by announcing and promising him another life after this; if it can be shewn that they are necessarily connected with the origin and progress of that dispensation, and that without them it could not have been effected, then these miracles will become proper objects of our attention, and we shall listen without prejudice to the testimony adduced to prove their reality. The argument, therefore, stands thus: the disciples of Christ who saw the miracles inferred from thence the divinity of his mission, and the truth of his doctrines. We who first learn the excellence of his doctrines, the wisdom of his precepts, and the importance of his promises, find in them marks and characters so superior to the wisdom of the greatest philosophers, as to lead us to the opinion that their origin may be divine; and our minds being thus prepared to admit the possibility that miraculous powers may have been exerted in support of so excellent a dispensation, are thus disposed to inquire into the evidence on which these powers are attempted to be established.

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Christianity, as I have before observed, is evidently founded on miracles; and those to whom it was originally preached either knew that they were false, or believed them to be true. If they knew that they were false, then the persons who attested them, and pretended to perform them, must have been impostors, and would have been universally treated as such. For though it is not impossible that a few crafty and designing men should, for crafty and selfish purposes, join in propagating a doctrine which they knew to be false, it is contrary to the knowledge we have of human nature to suppose that multitudes should embrace what they knew to be an imposture, when by adopting it they must sacrifice their dearest enjoyments, and submit to privations, hardships, and dangers, without any hope of recompense, either here or hereafter. If, on the other hand, they believed the miracles to be true, it is a very strong presumption that they were so; for they had opportunities of examining and inquiring into the facts propounded to them, to judge of the credit of the persons by whom those facts were attested. And, above all, they were themselves witnesses of the miracles which the first propagators of the gospel performed in attestation of the truth of their narrative. Let the epistles ascribed to St. Paul have been written at what time and by whom you please, they prove that miraculous powers existed in those days, as they appeal not only to those who had witnessed the exhibition of them, but also to those who were pos-

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sessed of power to perform them; and these, certainly, could hardly be mistaken as to the truth of their existence.

It is not easy to account for the first propagation and subsequent progress of Christianity, on the supposition of the whole being a fabrication, when we consider, 1. The improbability of the story; 2. The nature of the doctrine; and, 3. The insignificance of the persons by whom it was promulgated.

1. The story, that a man, after having suffered death as a malefactor, rose again from his grave, and gave a commission to a few illiterate and obscure men to announce a new religion in direct opposition to the prejudices, the passions, the habits and customs of the several people to whom it was preached, was not likely, in the first instance, to meet with much credit. It annihilated at one stroke the Jewish ritual and worship, which they had sanctimoniously observed for several ages, and to which they were superstitiously attached; and it is not to be believed that the new religion would have met with any proselytes in that country, if all the facts on which it pretended to be founded, had been mere inventions, and the fabrications of its propagators: the Jews, undoubtedly, had every opportunity possible to judge of the truth of these facts.

Though the Gentiles had not equal opportunities of examining into the truth of the miracles and resurrection of Jesus, yet they had an account of these

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events from eye-witnesses, — irreproachable men, whose testimony was not only uniform and consistent, but confirmed by the miraculous powers which they themselves manifested on several occasions, and which were a direct and irrefutable appeal to the senses of those they addressed. This happened in a civilized age, among learned and enlightened nations, in Greece and Rome; nor is it to be imagined that men of education and knowledge, or even of common sense, would have listened to a story of a man rising from the dead, and authorizing a few vagrant Jews to promulgate a new religion to the world, unless they could give better credentials of their mission than their bare affirmation.

2. The nature of the doctrine. Had the Apostles preached a doctrine which flattered the prejudices or inflamed the passions of their hearers, it is possible they might have made proselytes without the aid of miracles, or being obliged to bring proofs of the wonderful facts they related. But the very reverse was the truth. Nothing could so strongly shock the prejudices of the Jews as the new tenets that were submitted to them. They put an end to all hopes of deliverance from the yoke of Rome, to all the temporal glories of the reign of their long-expected Messiah, and, above all, reduced them to a level with other nations of the earth, from whom they always considered it as their peculiar privilege and glory to have been separated and particularly distinguished by the singular favour and partial selection of the Almighty. All this must have been abandoned, and themselves re-

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duced to receive a new religion from the hands of the followers and servants of the man whom they had crucified as an impostor. Would they, but on the strongest evidence, receive that doctrine from the apostles, for which they had inflicted death on their master? The crucifixion of Jesus, if not followed by his resurrection, must naturally have thrown discredit on the cause; and accordingly we find that the apostles themselves only thought of dispersing, and giving up every thing for lost. Under these circumstances, is it probable that their preaching should have met with the success it did, without the assistance of supernatural events?

Nor was the strict morality prescribed by the apostles less repugnant to the corrupt state of morals among the Gentiles than to the prejudices of the Jews. An exhortation to abandon not only the vices, but the pomp and vanities of this world, to overcome rooted habits, and turn their attention to new and distant objects, was not a proposition to be lightly assented to by men whose affections had been hitherto absolutely confined to worldly pursuits.

It is true, a tempting recompense was held out to them in the hope and promise of eternal happiness in a future state; but as the object was vast and stupendous, it required evidence proportionably strong to obtain credit to promises so extraordinary, and which the hearer must know it was impossible for mere unassisted human reason to discover, or human power to bestow. It required, therefore, something

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more than the individual testimony of a few wandering Jews to induce mankind to receive such promises with implicit faith. On the whole, the great incompatibility of the doctrine with the prejudices, the passions, the habits, of those to whom it was proposed, forbids our belief that it could be received by them without examination; and the great and astounding importance of the doctrine of eternal life, was such as called, in a particular manner, for the strictest investigation into the authority by which obscure men held forth such magnificent promises.

When Mahomet promulgated his religion, he addressed himself to Arabs, men who lived by violence and rapine. He promised them victory over their enemies, rich booty, and great plunder; he held out to them the promise of conquest and opulence in this world, and the joys of a sensual paradise in the next; he indulged their prejudices, and roused their passions, and by these obvious means secured their adherence. Had he prescribed to them a peaceable and quiet life, and a total abstinence from violence and blood, I am inclined to believe that all the houris of his sensual paradise could not have induced any of his followers to embrace Islamism.

3. The insignificance of the persons by whom Christianity was promulgated: and this leads us to consider the third head of my argument.

III. Christianity was promulgated by ignorant and illiterate men, who had no personal influence, and

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must have derived their whole credit from the weight and evidence of their doctrines, instead of giving any consequence to those doctrines from their character or station.

It sometimes happens that opinions are disseminated and customs established, and even modes of faith and systems of religion consecrated, by the authority and influence of their authors. But no such thing can be pretended in this case. Far from being men of authority and influence, the Apostles laboured under every possible disadvantage.

With respect to the Jews, they were not only known to be low, obscure, and illiterate, but they must have been peculiarly obnoxious, as being the followers of a man who, after having foretold that he should rise again the third day, had been executed as an impostor. If the prophecy was not accomplished, the crucifixion of the person who uttered it must have totally blasted the cause; and the Apostles who, notwithstanding the death of their master and the falsehood of his prophecy, should have ventured to revive the exploded imposition, must have been universally hooted and discountenanced: nor can their success, under such circumstances, be ascribed to any other cause than the proofs they gave of Christ's resurrection, and the manifestation of their own miraculous powers.

With respect to the Gentiles, the Apostles were mere wandering strangers, obscure, and unconnected, known only as coming from Judæa, a country held in the utmost contempt. Is it to be conceived that

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such men would have been listened to, and that whole nations, abandoning their own religion, should have embraced their doctrine, on a bare, incredible relation, unless they had brought proofs of some kind to render so extraordinary an account reconcileable to reason and the common feelings of mankind?

It may be objected, indeed it is a common objection, that the Jewish nation, among whom these miracles were said to have been exhibited, were not converted; that only private individuals believed in Christ; and that in all towns there is always an ignorant rabble ready and willing to adopt any innovation, and to give credit to the most groundless fictions, especially if they are of a marvellous nature. It would be absurd to contend that there is no weight in the objection. At first sight, and separately considered, it carries a strong appearance of reason; but when the whole dispensation is examined with attention and impartiality, it will perhaps be found that the evidence to the truth of the Gospel is, upon the whole, rather strengthened than diminished by the incredulity of the Jews. 1. If Christianity had been proposed to the Gentiles supported by the whole weight of the Jewish nation, it would not have rested, as it does at present, so entirely on the bare evidence of facts, or the supernatural aid it received from above. 2. It would have contradicted the prophecies. And, 3, We should have been deprived of one of the strongest and most striking evidences of its truth by the very singular dispersion of the Jews.

The good character, and the sufferings of the

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Apostles and early Christians have been much insisted on; and it is often contended, that in exposing themselves to hardships, to dangers, and to death, they could have been impelled by no other motive than a sincere persuasion of the truth of what they professed.

Too much stress has, in my opinion, been laid upon these arguments. In this, as in many other instances, revelation has suffered more from the injudicious defense of its supporters than from the attacks of its opponents. When weak and inconclusive arguments are relied on, it is naturally inferred that no better can be adduced; and when the intelligent inquirer after truth finds Christianity defended only by arguments which carry no conviction to his mind, he is apt, without further investigation, to reject a system which he finds so inadequately supported; and it seldom happens that he examines whether the feebleness of the defense results from the weakness of the cause, from want of ability in its supporters, or, as is very frequently the case, from the false views which are entertained by the advocate, who is generally more anxious to support some particular establishment than to vindicate the genuine doctrines of Christianity.

The sufferings of the martyrs prove, at the utmost, the sincerity of their belief; but they by no means establish the truth of the doctrine itself. Every religion and every sect has had its martyrs; and it would betray a very imperfect knowledge of human nature to contend that men must be convinced of

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the truth and justice of every cause in which they expose themselves to danger. Every man who embraces the profession of a soldier suffers as many hardships and encounters as many perils as those who first devoted themselves to the propagation of Christianity: and what are the usual inducements to adopt a military life? The love of fame, a fondness for distinction, idle and dissipated habits, are the motives which generally tempt men to the profession of arms. And they adopt it with a full knowledge of the dangers to which it subjects them, though many of them might live in the enjoyment of ease and comfort among their families and friends. When once men have engaged in any important enterprise, and have distinguished themselves by supporting it—whether they were originally actuated by motives of duty, of interest, or of ambition,—they are usually found to adhere to their purpose, in spite of every opposition, and through all the misfortunes which may beset them. Consistency, firmness, and the same energy of character that originally suggested the attempt, support their constancy in the moment of trial, and induce them rather to sacrifice their lives than disgrace themselves and the cause they have espoused by a pusillanimous recantation.

Innumerable are the instances that might be adduced to shew how often men will encounter death from obstinacy, the shame of retracting, or a fear of the opinions of others. We daily see men expose their lives in a duel, in opposition to reason,

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morality, and religion, merely to comply with the prevailing point of honour. We have instances, even in the softer sex, of women who have sacrificed their lives in defense of their honour, resisting at the same time the strongest impulse of nature, and the instinctive love of existence. The Malabar women are so devoted to a false point of honour, as voluntarily to sacrifice themselves on the funeral piles of their deceased husbands.

Nor is the argument, that the Apostles could have no motive to deceive mankind at the expense of their ease, their safety, and their lives, in my opinion, by any means conclusive. Even if no rational motive could be discovered for their conduct, it might be said that men do not always act rationally, or that they might have been influenced by motives of which we are ignorant. Do we not every day see men engage in pursuits which cannot be accounted for on any principles of reason? And when it is considered how many various passions constitute the springs of human conduct, there will not appear any thing more unaccountable in their conduct—even supposing it an imposture—than we find every day in the conduct of impostors. They were men of the lowest description, who earned their bread by their daily labour, and any change in their situation might appear to them advantageous; and, in point of fact, it may, perhaps, admit of a doubt, whether their condition as preachers of the Gospel was not, in point of worldly enjoyment and comfort, preferable to that which they quitted. The toil, the sufferings, and

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the persecutions, endured by the Apostles, must not be compared with the ease and luxuries of the opulent, but with the servile drudgery and laborious occupations of those who earn their daily bread by their daily toil. But, supposing that they did suffer greater hardships from their new way of life, they are not the first who have made a false estimate of human affairs, and who, with the view of bettering their condition, have abandoned a safe and easy situation to engage in pursuits which have destroyed their tranquillity and happiness, and brought them to an untimely grave.

The vanity or ambition of being at the head of a new sect might, perhaps, be a sufficient temptation to engage them to abandon their mean and laborious occupations, in the hope of being the teachers of nations and the leaders of mankind. If these were the feelings by which they were prompted, it must be acknowledged that the success which attended their undertaking was quite sufficient to gratify them. It is very true, that they incurred danger, and that some of them suffered death. This, however, is the usual lot attending all ambitious schemes, all attempts to change the religion or the government of a state. Yet in all ages, and in all nations, we find that such attempts have been common. And from the accounts we have received of the false Messiahs that about this time appeared among the Jews, it is evident that the dangers they were likely to incur did not deter impostors from engaging in these perilous adventures.

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Though, in my opinion, the arguments urged from the supposed motives of the Apostles are by no means conclusive, yet it appears to me that the most satisfactory conclusions may be drawn in favour of the truth of Christianity from the great improbability that twelve men, such as we find them to have been, should have formed the extensive plan of changing the religion of the whole world, and the moral impossibility that they could have invented such a system of morals and theology as is contained in the Gospel.

It is undeniable that the men who propagated the new faith were of a low condition in life, illiterate, and, as far as appears to us, of no great abilities, natural or acquired. That such men should have conceived the design of overturning the religion, not only of Judæa, but of the whole civilized world, is as inconceivable as that they should have succeeded in it by their own natural means, without divine assistance. The false Messiahs we read of in history were, in all probability, possessed of greater natural abilities, and certainly they appeared under pretenses as favourable to the prejudices of the Jews as the doctrines of the Apostles were hostile to them: yet none of them met with the slightest success.

That the disciples of a man who suffered death as an impostor should, in the name of their crucified master, be able—without the influence of power or riches, of learning or natural abilities—to establish a new religion, which militated against the prejudices, the interests, and inveterate habits of their country-

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men,—a religion founded on the authority of a dead man, who had foretold his resurrection at the end of three days, and who, therefore, if he did not rise must be convicted of falsehood, is, surely, an event not easily to be accounted for, according to the common principles and motives that actuate mankind. Nor is it more probable that a few obscure fishermen and handicraftsmen, coming from the most despised and abhorred country in the world, should be able to draw the attention and engage the confidence of the most learned and enlightened nations on the globe, and to induce them to give so much credit to a story in itself improbable, as to admit it as the basis of a new faith, to which they sacrificed both the religion of their ancestors, and the speculations of their philosophers,—unless the preachers of the new faith had brought some stronger evidence of the truth of the miraculous facts they taught them than the bare assertion of a few obscure and illiterate wanderers. Is it possible to account for their success, without believing that they illustrated the truth of what they taught, either by undeniable testimony or by the evidence of miraculous powers?

A late celebrated historian took very great pains, but, in my opinion, with very little success, to shew that Christianity might have sprung up and prevailed as it has done without any supernatural assistance: but even when I entertained the strongest doubts of the truth of revelation, I always thought his five causes were indebted for the great attention with which they were received, examined,

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and refuted, rather to the popularity of the work in which they appeared, and the celebrity of its author, than to any intrinsic weight of argument or force of reasoning. I am persuaded that, had they come into the world in plain language as an anonymous pamphlet, they would have met with little notice.

1. *The zeal of the first Christians.*

It will be admitted on all hands that the propagation of Christianity was, in a great degree, owing to the zeal of its first professors; but this very zeal appears to me a strong evidence at least of their persuasion of the truth of the doctrines they maintained, and, therefore, is of itself a strong presumption of the truth of that revelation, which they had every opportunity of examining, and which afterwards they embraced with so much ardour. Their zeal must have been founded on conviction at least, if not on evidence.

2. *The doctrine of a future life* is stated as the second cause.

The hope of a future state of everlasting happiness is no doubt a strong motive to religion and virtue; but as the object is great, in the same proportion must the evidence of such promises be clear and strong. It does not follow, because a man wishes for immortality, that he must listen to every idle fellow who promises such a boon to his followers. Men must know that mere man, without a divine revelation, cannot bestow such a blessing on his fellow men. The first Christians must therefore have had some stronger motives for believing the future immortality of mankind, as delivered and explained

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by the Apostles, than others had for believing the same doctrine when disseminated by others. For a future state was not a new tenet, invented by the Apostles: it had been much canvassed by the philosophers; and though some of them had before strongly inculcated such an opinion, yet it had no practical effect: the immortality of the soul, like any other philosophical proposition, was merely a subject of speculation; it was reserved for the Gospel to render it subservient to morality. According to that system, it was immediately connected with the moral conduct of men, by which their happiness or misery was eternally to be decided. Such a doctrine must undoubtedly have a great influence on the minds of those who received it; but then it was not a doctrine to be lightly adopted, on the bare word of a few contemptible fishermen, wandering about the country, and coming from the despised land of Judæa.

3. *The miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive Christians.*

This leads us back to the question, Whether the miracles ascribed to them are true or false. If true, then the inferences drawn from them respecting the truth of revelation are indisputable. There appears a shrewd ambiguity in the historian's reasoning, or rather a wish to confound the miracles related in Scripture with those afterwards ascribed to the Church, the truth of which has been reasonably doubted. But admitting, what I am afraid cannot be denied, that the Church, when vested with power,

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authority, and influence, has on several occasions endeavoured to increase that authority by pretended miracles, that will not account for the original progress of Christianity. There was then no church to use a corrupt influence; the assent of the first believers arose from the evidence and facts laid before them by men who, far from having any power or influence to enforce their doctrines, preached them with a halter round their neck, at the risk of their lives and liberty, and involved those who listened to them in similar danger. When, therefore, mention is made of the miracles ascribed to the primitive church, a distinction is to be made between the miracles recorded in Scripture and those ascribed to the Church in after ages. With the latter we have nothing to do; and with respect to the former, the whole will depend on the great question, whether those miracles were truly or falsely ascribed to the apostles and those authorized by them.

As to the 4th cause, *The virtues of the first Christians.*

This is rather a singular argument. The vices of Christians have often, and with some reason, been urged to discredit their religion; but now their very virtues are set in array against them. We may, without danger to the cause, admit the fact, that the virtues of the first Christians were highly instrumental in spreading and recommending their religion: they were known by their fruits. But how will the historian account for those virtues, which he acknowledges to have distinguished the early pro-

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fessors of Christianity? They have been hitherto considered as evidences of the excellence of the morality, and of the purity of the doctrines, as well as of the sincerity of those who practised them. It is a singular way of reasoning, to contend that they were impostors, because they were virtuous; and that the religion which led them to form societies, which made them austere in their morals, peaceable and patient in their conduct, sober, chaste, and temperate, abstaining from pleasure, luxury, and every immoral gratification, was a religion founded on hypocrisy or delusion; or that they would have voluntarily embraced such a self-denying way of life, without some well-grounded hope of future compensation for all the pleasures and enjoyments they sacrificed in obedience to the faith which they professed.

5. *The union and discipline of the Church.*

This seems to me very weak and inconclusive. At best it will only account for the progress and not for the origin of Christianity, which is the great and material point. An army must be enlisted before it can be disciplined: so, before union and discipline were introduced into the Christian church, Christians must have already existed; and the origin of their church or societies appears to have been owing to the necessity of consulting together for their own safety, in an age when they were exposed to persecution and various sorts of vexation, from the adherents of the old pagan superstitions. With the conduct of the church after it was firmly established

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we have nothing to do. After a certain time, every miraculous interference seems to have been withheld, and the further propagation of Christianity to have been left to the operation of secondary causes, assisted by the proofs and evidences of the miraculous origin upon which it was contended to have been founded. It is, therefore, sufficient to prove that those secondary causes will by no means account for the original propagation of Christianity, without admitting the miraculous events in which it professes to have its foundation.

The very circumstances, alleged by the historian to prove that Christianity was propagated by natural causes, are to me the strongest evidence of its divine origin and miraculous establishment. I am willing to grant all that he contends for. I will admit that the *zeal* of the first Christians, their *belief of a future state*, their *miraculous powers*, their *virtues*, and *the union and discipline* of their community, were the means by which Christianity was propagated and spread over the world; and as the miraculous powers are evidently believed by the historian to have been rather ascribed to than really possessed by them, I am willing to leave them out of the account. Admitting, therefore, all the efficacy he chooses to ascribe to these several causes, still it is incumbent on him to account for the existence and concurrence of these causes which were never found so united and efficacious on any other occasion. It is evident that they were themselves the effects of some antecedent cause, which it was the duty of

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the author to have investigated; and as he has not taught us where to look for it, we are inevitably compelled to receive the only solution yet offered us, which can rationally account for the concurrence of all these causes in spreading the new faith.

If we believe what is recorded in the Gospels and the book of Acts, of the preaching, the doctrine, the miracles, and the resurrection, of Christ, as well as the miraculous powers bestowed on the Apostles, we shall easily account for the *zeal* of the early Christians, and that *their belief of a future state* should be productive of those *virtues* which distinguished their conduct, as well as of those *regulations of order and discipline* which served to maintain the purity of their religion among themselves, and to recommend it to the world; but if we reject those records, I am at a loss where to find motives that could have produced such effects.

It is not necessary, in order to prove the divine origin of our religion, to admit the truth of all the legends of miracles which have been imposed upon the world; neither is it necessary to ascertain the precise time when miraculous powers ceased in the Christian church. It is sufficient if we believe in the miraculous powers recorded in Scripture during the ministry of Christ and the apostolic age; because the very object of these miracles was, by the assurance of a happy immortality in a future state, to rouse that *zeal*, and create those *virtues*, which afterwards enabled the converts to the new faith to propagate their religion without supernatural assistance.

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If the causes by which Christianity was propagated, as stated by the historian, refer to that period when miracles were withdrawn, and the propagation of the new religion was left to the operation of natural causes, we may admit the efficacy of these causes, without the slightest impeachment of its divine and miraculous origin and early progress, for it is universally admitted, after a certain period, to have been left to the operation of secondary causes, and the natural course of events. But, though applied chronologically to the period of which he treats, it seems to have been the intention of the historian that his arguments should have a retrospective reference to the origin and institution of Christianity itself. Considered in themselves, and abstractedly from the observations which they were intended to introduce, there is nothing really objectionable in the five causes; they are even such as an advocate for Christianity might adopt with the strictest propriety. He might reason thus:—

After the apostolic age, when the truth of Christianity had been sufficiently established by the miracles and wonderful works which proved its divine origin, the church was no longer invested with miraculous powers; but the further progress and propagation of that religion were left to the operation of natural causes, and to the *zeal of its professors,* which was so strongly excited by the *certain hopes of future immortality*—founded on the *miraculous exertions* of power, which, confirming the divine mission of the Author of their faith, convinced them of the truth

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of his promises—that it induced them to devote themselves to the propagation of their religion, and to recommend it to the surrounding nations by the *most exemplary virtues* and purity of life; and led them to adopt such *discipline and regulations in their communities*, as to give the most powerful effect to their labours in promulgating their doctrines.

Upon the whole, it appears to me that it is incontrovertible that the original grounds on which Christianity was founded, are, in every essential particular, the same as those which constitute now the foundation of a Christian's faith: and as the facts alleged in its support were of such a nature as to be open to the examination of the new converts, and as it is reasonable to believe that neither Jews nor Gentiles would take these facts for granted without investigation, on such slender authority as their confidence in the obscure and insignificant persons who reported them, who were either strangers or obnoxious to them; so it is natural to suppose that they used the means of inquiry that were open to them, and did not admit the reality of those facts without sufficient evidence: and, when all these things are considered, I cannot but be of opinion that the very existence of Christianity at this day is a strong presumption of its truth; because it is difficult to imagine, and it has never yet been suggested, how it could have obtained its rise and progress on the supposition that it was an imposture.

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IV. Nor is it easy to imagine that men, such as the Apostles are represented, could have invented so excellent a doctrine;—a system which the wisest philosophers could never have thought of.

In the first place, it is highly improbable that a few uneducated fishermen should have been able to form a system of morality, more perfect, more pure, more consistent and uniform, than all the wisdom of the wisest philosophers from the beginning of the world had been able to produce.

If it is objected, that these ostensible authors of the new faith might be only instruments in the hands of more able and ingenious men by whom the whole scheme was concocted in secret,—can we imagine that these able and ingenious men should have committed the charge of propagating their views to persons so totally unqualified for the undertaking? Besides which, if Christianity had been a fable thus cunningly devised, we should expect to find, that, when it had begun to spread, as it did beyond what could possibly have been foreseen or hoped for, some of the real authors would have come publicly forward to turn the success of the Apostles to their own advantage. But no one ever appeared to claim the glory of the undertaking. Of those who subsequently joined the first preachers of the Gospel, St. Paul was the only man at all distinguished either for abilities or education: and though he was certainly superior to the rest of the Apostles in both respects, yet he appears to have been more remark-

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able for zeal, ardour, and intrepidity, than for any uncommon strength of abilities or powers of reasoning; and, indeed, the religion he preached was, as he observed, rather founded on facts than argument. Though he was a Pharisee, and therefore of some distinction, it does not appear that he was a man of any great weight or large property among them, as he is represented to be a tent-maker. But whatever might be his learning, his abilities, his wealth, or influence, it is certain he was not the original contriver of the new religion, since he was, in the first instance, one of its most violent persecutors.

Whether, however, the Apostles were the real authors of the new faith, or whether they were put forward by secret advisers of more skill and wisdom —and if the latter was the case, they remain secret and unknown to this day,—still it will always remain a question, how they or their advisers were able to produce rules of morality, not only so much purer and more perfect than any philosophical system hitherto known, but which were, at the same time, so repugnant to the prejudices of the Jews, and so incompatible with the morals of the Gentiles, as to be calculated rather to obstruct than to facilitate the propagation of the religion which they taught. That they should have undertaken such a task,—that they should have announced with confidence and boldness the certainty of a future state, which it was impossible, as men, they should know without a special revelation from above,—and that they should therefore appeal in confirmation of

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their doctrine to the miracles performed by Christ during his abode on earth, to his resurrection, and to the miraculous powers which they possessed themselves, and which they bestowed on others,—if all these pretensions were without the least foundation;—requires more faith to believe than any of the doctrines of Christianity.

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CHAPTER IX.

ON THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY.

THE arguments contained in the foregoing chapter may fairly be alleged, even on the confined ground which I have there taken; viz. that the moral doctrines of Christ and his promise of future life, sanctioned by the miracles he performed, by his resurrection, and the extraordinary powers he bestowed on the Apostles (which formed the original basis of Christianity, and continue to be the fundamental articles of our faith), were the only unquestioned facts upon which we could depend for the truth of revelation. But the evidence in its favour will receive strong additional confirmation, if we make it appear that the books of the New Testament are the same which were received as authentic by the earliest Christians, and must, therefore, have been written at the time, and by or under the direction of those in whose name they are come down to us.

It is known that the first Christians had books under the same designation, which they looked upon with veneration, as containing the authentic records and the origin of their faith; that these books agreed with our own in the great fundamentals of Christianity, and, as far as we can judge, from the numerous

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quotations contained in the writings of the fathers, that they also agreed with them in their contents. It is likewise known, that, from the times of the earliest Christians, these sacred depositories of their religion were kept with extreme care and caution; that they were multiplied to an immense extent, translated into various languages, and spread over the whole world. Is it, therefore, I will not say probable, but possible, that the copies of these genuine books should have been all destroyed without exception; and that a spurious and fabricated version should have been insensibly substituted in their place, and universally received through all the nations of the Christian world, without the least trace or intimation that a different version had ever existed? Very soon after the establishment of Christianity, it was divided into various sects, which all, however, acknowledged the same books as authority; for, notwithstanding their violent contentions as to the sense and interpretation of Scripture, they all agreed as to the authenticity of the text. If there was some dispute with respect to a few books of no material importance, it will only confirm my statement, because here, as in other cases, the exception proves the rule.

Surely, if any of the books thus admitted to be genuine had been changed or corrupted by any one of those sects, the adverse party would have detected and exposed the imposture. The bare attempt to substitute a new book in the room of any of those which had acquired the veneration of the Christian

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world would have been met with universal indignation: still more impossible is it to believe that all the old versions should have been changed for the new ones at the same moment, through so many different nations, languages, and contending sects; and that those who had studied and were conversant with the one should have received the other without any discussion, and without being sensible of the change: this, surely, would be as great a miracle as any recorded in the Gospel.

For these reasons, I have no doubt but that the Gospels and the Epistles of St. Paul, which we have in our Bibles, are the same as the books which the earliest Christians admitted as the authentic records of their faith. When I say they are the same, I do not vouch for every letter or sentence: some inaccuracies may, and some have been proved to, exist in these writings; but from the great multiplication of them, and the various sects in whose hands they were, it is not probable that these variations can be numerous or important. We have the copies of the different churches, which agree with each other in all material points, and afford a strong proof of the care that was taken of those books, and the veneration in which they were held; since the spirit of party, and, of all parties the most virulent, that of religious animosity, has not prevailed so far as to induce any of the contending sects to falsify these sacred records, in order to adapt them to their own purposes.

These arguments receive additional confirmation

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from the internal evidence of the writings themselves, which bear strong marks of having been written by contemporary writers at the time of the establishment of Christianity, most especially the Epistles of St. Paul, which are clearly occasional, written to different assemblies of Christians, and relating chiefly to temporal events and local circumstances which happened to those different societies at their first institution; insomuch that many of the references are now obscure and not easily to be explained, even by learned commentators; but there is enough sufficiently intelligible to convince every attentive and impartial reader, that they must have been written in the very outset and first propagation of the Christian faith.

Now, if we admit the books of Scripture in our hands to be genuine,—that is, to have been written at the time by persons who had the means of knowing the truth of what they related,—their contents will afford a very strong internal evidence in favour of the truth of revelation.

When we talk of the internal evidence of Scripture, I am aware it is a two-edged sword, and that the strongest objections have been derived from the doctrines which are supposed to be contained in those books. And certainly, if predestination, and the indefeasible election of some men and final reprobation of others; if the doctrine of a Trinity in Unity; if the sufferings of a God who is impassible; if the death of a being who is immortal; if the punishment of an innocent, perfect, and divine being

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for the sins of such miserable creatures as we are;—if these, and some other tenets which have been but too extensively received in the Christian world, were articles of faith contained in those writings, the question would be at an end; nothing would remain but to close the books and consign them to oblivion;—for no evidence can be so strong, no argument so cogent, as to establish conclusions so derogatory to common sense, so destructive of every rational conception of the Deity. But when these notions are exploded, and the doctrines of the Gospel reconciled to the reason of mankind, as I have endeavoured to do in the early part of this treatise; then it must be acknowledged that the books of the New Testament bear the strongest marks of truth, both from the matter which they contain, and the manner in which they are related; and afford, from their internal evidence, one of the strongest proofs of the divine origin of Christianity.

The first object that presents itself is the excellence of the morality of Jesus. Even if it were true that there is nothing absolutely new in any of his precepts, yet where can we find a code of morals at once so comprehensive, and so unexceptionable? Is there any duty that is not enforced, or any thing recommended which reason would disavow? While the showy ostentatious qualities that drew upon them the admiration of the Heathens, as well as the formal and ceremonious practices to which the Jews attributed so much merit, are passed over without notice,

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the more amiable but less obtrusive virtues of meekness, humility, forgiveness of injuries, and universal kindness and benevolence, are insisted upon as the proper and indispensable qualifications of a Christian.

These virtues, if not absolutely a new discovery, were certainly placed in a new and much stronger light than ever they had appeared in before. Indeed, I cannot but consider humility, forgiveness of injuries, and love of our enemies, as doctrines peculiar to Christianity. It might indeed happen, that when philosophers and orators were inveighing against excessive pride or inordinate revenge, they might in the warmth of their eloquence recommend meekness of temper and placability of spirit: but these were not inculcated among the great duties of life; and even when forgiveness was recommended, it was from a spirit of pride rather than from benevolence, and the offender was held out more as an object of contempt than of affection.

The precepts of Jesus, it must likewise be remarked, are not confined to the regulation of the outward conduct; on the contrary, their chief aim is the improvement and purification of the heart. Every sort of ostentation is banished from the social and religious duties of a Christian. The applause or censure of the world is not in any degree to be taken as the guide of his actions; his only object is to obtain the approbation of God and of his own conscience.

Now, from what but a divine source could these

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uneducated men have drawn this pure, perfect, and comprehensive scheme of morality? Was it from the exclusive theology of the Jews—among whom every stranger was considered as an enemy, and viewed with jealousy and hatred—that they derived that spirit of universal charity which constitutes the very essence of Christianity? Or was this spirit of diffusive benevolence suggested by the narrow and confined virtue of Gentile patriotism? We who, from our Christian education, have been familiar with these doctrines from our infancy, cannot easily form an idea of the moral impossibility that they should have suggested themselves to a few fishermen of Galilee, nursed up in the prejudices of the Jews, and possessed of no human means of acquiring a system of morality so utterly at variance with the feelings, the opinions, and the religion, of their countrymen.

But the morality of Jesus, however entitled to admiration, is neither the most astonishing nor the most efficient part of the Gospel. The most perfect system of ethics will be little more than a subject of mere speculation, unless it holds out some sanction to its precepts. Philosophers have exerted themselves with great industry to prove that virtue is conducive to happiness in this life; and with some degree of success: but as they were sensible that their rule did not hold good in all cases, they have endeavoured to supply that defect by enlarging on the intrinsic excellence, the beauty, and the loveliness of virtue, which they contended ought to be

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cultivated for its own sake, independently of any advantages resulting from it. This was a very good theme for eloquent declamation, but never came home to the bosom of mankind:

> Quis enim virtutem amplectitur ipsam,
> Præmia si tollas?

If, in the regulation of their conduct, men were confined to considerations regarding its consequences in the present life, prudence would undoubtedly be the cardinal virtue. Few men would sacrifice any point of material importance on account of the beauty of some virtue, the observance of which would neither promote their happiness, raise their credit, nor contribute to their glory either here or hereafter.

It is by supplying a motive to the practice of virtue, independently of its influence on our happiness in this life, that the Gospel is distinguished from every other religion or moral system that ever existed. A future state of retribution is the great sanction of the moral precepts of Jesus. This final state of retribution was not put forward with diffidence and doubt; nor was it deduced from uncertain reasoning or probable inference, as the dark glimmerings of the doctrine had been by heathen philosophers; nor was it treated, as it had been by them, as a mere subject of speculation and dispute: it was announced by Jesus as a certain and absolute fact, on which the very end of his mission entirely depended,—which he therefore published on divine authority, and which he held forth as the great mo-

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tive for repentance and amendment of life. Upon this was built his whole system of morality; it was the end of his preaching, of his suffering, of his death, of his resurrection. If there was no future state, all these were vain and to no purpose.

It appears morally impossible that a future state should have been implicitly believed, unless the authority of the person by whom it was announced were established by some proof of his power to make good what he had promised. Accordingly Jesus appealed for the truth of his mission to the miracles which he performed; and it is scarcely possible that those who believed the promise he made should disbelieve the miracles on which they were founded. They were performed, or said to be performed, in the most public manner; before enemies as well as friends; in the presence of the priests and Pharisees, and all the ruling powers, interested to prove them to be false, who did not even deny the reality of them, without admitting, as a consequence, that he who performed them was the Messiah. And if these miracles were the invention of the relators of them, it is absolutely incredible that they should dare to annex to their accounts the names of persons, places, dates, and other local circumstances, which must have exposed the falsehood to certain detection.

The wonderful simplicity of the narrative shews that it is the production of the most artless or of the most artful of mankind. Either it is what it professes to be, a naked and unadorned exposition of

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facts, related as they occurred; or it is a fabrication by the most consummate proficients in deception, who had reached the highest perfection of skill—the art of concealing art. There is what the French call a naïveté in the whole which is truly astonishing. It is a bare, simple narrative without the least appearance of design, or even of interest. There is no attempt to serve a particular purpose: the foibles, the weaknesses, and the prejudices, of the writers are faithfully recorded; and not a word escapes them that can directly or indirectly be construed into an attempt to praise or recommend themselves,—not even an encomium on their master.

There is no endeavour in any of the Evangelists to prove the truth of Christ's mission by any kind of reasoning independently of his actions and discourses, except in the few instances where reference is made to the prophecies in attestation of his being the Messiah. And is it conceivable that these writers should have recourse to fictitious miracles in support of a cause which they do not even endeavour to sustain by argument or inference? If this proceeded from simplicity and artlessness, the same disposition of mind would prevent their having recourse to falsehood and deceit; and if it arose from incapacity, the same want of ability which rendered them unfit for the use of argument would hardly have supplied them with so many miracles as we find in the Gospel;—which, if fictitious, are so plausibly fabricated, and so artfully connected with the moral precepts and characteristic discourses of

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their master, as to require more than common abilities to invent and amalgamate. The miracles are related with the same simplicity and with the same degree of circumstantiality as the rest of the narrative: the writers draw no inference from them, but leave them to speak for themselves.

There are several minute passages in the books of the New Testament which prove, beyond a doubt, that they were written at the time supposed, by Jews, or persons to whom the state, customs, and opinions of the Jews were not only known but familiar: and what fixes the date with greater precision is, that the Jews were at that particular time in a kind of middle and ambiguous state, neither absolutely free and independent, nor yet totally in subjection to the Romans; their political condition, even in the course of the narrative, underwent several variations; and the whole of the account harmonizes in the most remarkable manner with the different alterations that took place in their government and in their relative situation to the Romans.

What is deserving of particular attention is, the character of Jesus himself,—so different from any other in real or fictitious narrative, and yet maintained throughout with such perfect consistency.

The history of his life is related by four several biographers; and the narrative of each is so far different from that of the other three, as to prove that they are not copies of one another. Yet, what identity is there in their several accounts! The

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Jesus of Matthew is evidently the Jesus of Mark, Luke, and John.

There was nothing systematic in his manner of teaching,—nothing of that artificial and studied logic under which imposture would have sheltered itself. He spoke as one having authority, and not as the Scribes. His discourses were in general occasional, arising from some circumstances that occurred. They were sometimes plain and dogmatical, at others, obscure and prophetic; and yet there was a manner in all of them that was peculiarly his own.

When the whole of the narrative is thoroughly examined, I think it will appear to every unprejudiced mind, that it was impossible for the poor, uneducated followers of Jesus to have devised such a system, and to have pursued it with any appearance or hope of success; and that men of the highest abilities and the greatest talents, even if they had been wise enough to invent the morality of Jesus, would never have thought of propagating and enforcing it by forging such a narrative as the Gospel: there is nothing in it of the means adopted by human wisdom for the attainment of its objects.

As, from a contemplation of the works of nature we deduce the proof of a First Cause, so, by a similar process of reasoning,—from the success of a religion which human wisdom could never have invented, by means which it was impossible for human wisdom to supply,—we are justified in ascribing its origin and its success to the especial agency of Divine Providence.

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CHAPTER X.

ON THE PROPHECIES.

BESIDES the arguments already urged in support of the truth of Christianity, there are others that will lead us to the same conclusion; and among these the prophecies have always been allowed great weight. It must be owned that many of them are obscure; to me, as well as to others who have not made them the particular object of their studies, they are very much so; and it cannot be denied that, in the interpretation of them, there is great room for the exercise of ingenuity and imagination. It cannot, however, be denied that, when some of them are attentively considered and compared with the events which they are supposed to foretel, there is a striking correspondence between them, that cannot be accounted for on any other principle.

The prophecies in the Old Testament which are applied to Christ cannot, at all events, be suspected of having being written after the event; and if there is some obscurity in them, it must be remembered that the Jews, who were better acquainted with the prophetic style of their own Scriptures than we are, understood those very prophecies as intended to designate the Messiah, whom, upon the strength of

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them, they expected at the very time when Jesus did in fact appear.

The Jews agree with us (and I consider their opinion in this respect of great weight), that these prophecies were to be applied to the Messiah, and, until their rejection of the Gospel led them to another interpretation, that he was to come at that very time; and if it is granted that they were prophetic of the Messiah, I consider the greatest difficulty to be removed; for, if referable to such a person, there can be little doubt that Christ was that person, from the many striking particulars in which the prophecy and the fulfilment exactly correspond.

It may, perhaps, be urged, that the authors of the life of Jesus, being Jews acquainted with the Old Testament, might accommodate and embellish the events which they related in such a manner as to assimilate them to the prophecies which had been applied by their countrymen to the expected Messiah. But their whole narrative is so evidently void of deceit, or apparent design of any kind, that it would be unjust to suspect them of such an artifice; and, indeed, any attempt of that nature to impose on the Jews was exactly that which was sure to expose them to detection.

There are prophecies, likewise, in the New Testament that require no small degree of attention. The destruction of the Temple would be a most striking proof of the prophetic powers of Jesus, if it were *absolutely* certain that the Gospels were written before that event. I say absolutely certain, for

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there is every degree of probability, short of absolute certainty, that they were so: they are referred to a date prior to the destruction of Jerusalem by the concurrent testimony of the ancient Christians; and if they had been written after, it is almost impossible but that they would have contained allusions, either designed or accidental, to so striking an event, especially as it would have afforded a proof of the fulfilment of the prophecies. If they were written after the destruction of Jerusalem, they would not derive much authority from the prophecy, unless it was known to have been made before: in that case, if mentioned at all, it would be by appealing to the testimony of those who had heard the prophecy, and knew it to have been made by Jesus; and then the fulfilment, not the prophecy, would have been chiefly adverted to.

The prophecy, likewise, is so interwoven with other matters, and delivered in words which, till they had been explained by the event, appeared so obscure, that it is highly improbable they should have been interpolated afterwards. The caution given to the Jews to fly from the calamity is likewise so strongly indicative of its having been delivered before the event, that it is almost impossible to attribute it to artifice or fraud; indeed, if it had been fabricated afterwards to answer any particular purpose, there is every reason to believe it would have been more direct and particular, and less in the style and obscurity of ancient prophecies.

There are other prophecies in the New Testament

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which cannot possibly have been written after the event. The success attending the propagation of Christianity, and the persecution of its professors,—two events which, at first sight, appear rather contradictory than coincident, and yet both verified by the event,—were among the predictions of the Gospel. But the most remarkable is the destruction and dispersion of the Jews, with the promise of their final restoration, which latter part is not yet fulfilled. But their destruction as a nation, and the dispersion of the people, are the most stupendous events recorded in history: this is a standing miracle, a permanent testimony of the providential interference of God in the punishment and preservation of that people. Here no argument is wanted, no proof is required; the fact is obvious, certain, and indisputable,—a fact, the only one of the kind ever known, and as unaccountable as it is notorious. The Jews have ceased for seventeen centuries to be a nation; but though dispersed far and wide throughout the habitable world, they continue to be a people distinct and separate from the nations among whom they live, in manner, in religion, and even in appearance. No instance in any degree similar occurs in the page of history.

England was inhabited by the ancient Britons; they were conquered by the Romans; the Saxons afterwards subdued the kingdom; the Danes then established their victorious hordes in the country, which was afterwards subdued by the Normans. But all these races, though originally different

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in manners, in religion, in habits, and long at variance and hostility with each other, have at last been consolidated into one people; and it is never asked, and could very seldom be answered, whether a man is descended from a Briton, a Roman, a Saxon, a Dane, or a Norman. What has occurred in this country has likewise happened in France, in Spain, and all the other nations in Europe, which are composed of various tribes, hordes, and races, yet so amalgamated into the same people that their origin is forgotten and unknown.

It is to little purpose to say that in some countries there are tribes which have preserved their ancient manners and customs, and have never been confounded with the more potent nations among whom they live. In the first place, the account we have of these people is too uncertain to prove anything. But if a small body of people should go and form a distinct community in a country thinly peopled, where they are left unmolested, there is nothing wonderful in their continuing as a distinct race to the end of time. But is there any similarity between them and a people, not living in a corner together by themselves, but dispersed in small divisions through every nation of the earth, and through all parts of each nation, forming no separate political body, without any judicature of their own; not a conquering but a subservient race, and yet for so many ages continuing to be totally distinct from all those under whose dominion they live?

And here I cannot help observing, that the laws

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given them by Moses and their other lawgivers seem to have been intended to this end, that by contracting an anti-social spirit, and looking with contempt and abhorrence upon strangers, they might continue an isolated people, obstinately attached to their own tribe, their own ceremonies and traditions, and so remain a standing monument of the providence of God in his dispensations towards that people, and, through them, towards mankind in general. Were all the Jews converted to Christianity, agreeably to the blind zeal of some Christians, it would annihilate one of the strongest proofs of the truth of revelation.

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CHAPTER XI.

ON THE OBJECTIONS TO CHRISTIANITY.

Objections certainly have been advanced to the truth of Revelation, and some of them, it must be acknowledged, not without weight; but it must be observed, that no possible revelation could be promulgated to which the wit of man could not find something to object.

I. There is one objection which has been more insisted on than it seems to me to deserve: it is not, indeed, peculiar to Christianity, but, if it is a difficulty at all, it is one that is equally applicable to natural as well as revealed religion;—I mean the impossibility of reconciling the foreknowledge of God with the liberty of man. It may appear presumptuous in me to see very little difficulty in what both Locke and Priestley confess to be inconceivable; but I think it the duty of every man to make the best use of his own reason, without being imposed upon by the weight of authorities, however respectable. I must, however, premise that I am no advocate for the doctrine of philosophical liberty, though I think the Divine prescience has nothing to do with the subject,

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notwithstanding Priestley considers it as in a manner decisive in favour of the necessitarian hypothesis.

It is very true that *we* cannot foresee any contingent event, except by inferring effects from causes: but then we are not gods,—and it does not follow that the Almighty cannot foreknow that which is to happen without tracing it through its progress from cause to effect. This is judging of perfect and infinite wisdom by the rules of an imperfect and finite understanding.

The mere knowledge of a present action does not necessitate or influence that action; and on the same principle, there is no reason to suppose that the foresight or foreknowledge of a future action must necessitate or influence that action. If I stand at my window and see a man ploughing a field, my knowledge that he is ploughing that field neither causes nor necessitates him to plough it: he would plough it equally though I did not stand at the window. Supposing my powers of sight to be miraculously extended, I might behold a man ploughing a field in the East Indies; yet the knowledge I should derive from this extended vision, would no more influence the Indian ploughman than the man who ploughs before my window. Suppose, again, that my organs were further miraculously improved, so as to make me a spectator, not of what is passing at the distance of thousands of miles, but of what is to come to pass next year; my bare knowledge of the facts which are then to happen, and which would happen equally though I had not foreseen them, will

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have no influence on those facts, any more than on those that are daily passing before my eyes.

Now if, by his prescience, every event, past and future, is in the sight of God as visible as the present, he does not necessarily influence the future any more than he does the present event; both may be equally known to him without his influencing either. Separate for a moment his prescience from his omnipotence, and the thing will, in my opinion, be manifest. Imagine a being endued with omniscience but divested of all power,—I can imagine that such a being, by means of his foreknowledge, might be capable of knowing what will happen in future, in the same manner as we know what passes before our eyes; yet it is plain that if he was without power he could not possess the means of causing and influencing those events.

The only difficulty is in conceiving how God can foresee contingent events. To explain the manner is certainly impossible; neither can I account for any of the Divine attributes; but it is by no means inconceivable to me, that the Being who created the world, who carries his view through the whole universe, should likewise extend it to futurity: nor is the Divine prescience, in my opinion, by any means so inconceivable as his self-existence, his eternity, or the infinity of space—ideas which, though we cannot comprehend them, we are bound to admit.

It is not, therefore, necessary to deny the prescience of God, because we are unable to define it; if that were the case, we must deny the being itself of a God,

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and take refuge in Atheism. But foreknowledge no more implies influence and causation than actual knowledge does. The difficulty in my mind is, not to reconcile the Divine prescience with the liberty of human actions, but to reconcile the foreknowledge of all the calamities and miseries which have afflicted this world with the Divine wisdom and goodness: but that is another consideration.

II. Having already said so much of miracles, I shall here add but little on the subject. The objections to miracles, *à prori*, I have before considered as weak and untenable; nor is it at all a reasonable conclusion, that because we do not at present witness any deviations from the established laws of nature, none can at any time have occurred: on the contrary, it is a matter susceptible of proof, that such deviations have taken place. Although we now find the system of the universe regulated by established laws, yet there must have been a time when this system had its origin,—or else it was eternal and uncaused, and in that case we are unavoidably led to Atheism.—If, then, this universe had a beginning, it must have been originally formed by miraculous powers; and are we justified in asserting that such miraculous powers could not exist then, because we have no experience of their having been exerted within the times to which our own information extends? Does the Gospel contain any miracle so stupendous as the creation of the world? or was the formation of man from nothing, or from a com-

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bination of matter, less a miracle than the restoration of a dead body to life? If we deny altogether the possibility of miracles because we do not see them recur every day, we must on the same principle deny the creation of the world and the original formation of mankind: and if we admit the miraculous operation of God in these great events, we must likewise admit the possibility at least, if not the probability, of the Divine interference after the creation, even though from our own individual experience, or what we choose to call authentic historical testimony, we have no evidence of any similar interposition.

But, then, the difficulty of proving a miracle. It has been observed, that it is more probable that a man should lie, than that the law of nature should be suspended. I grant it: and most certainly if the truth of the miracles depended solely on the veracity of any single individual, the objection would be just: for I am willing to admit that it is not the mere assertion of one man, nor even of a great number of men, unless supported by other evidence, that can establish a miracle. It is not simply because the miracles of the Gospel have been recorded by the Evangelists that they are entitled to our belief; it is because these miracles having been urged as proofs of the mission of Christ before persons who had an opportunity of forming a judgment on the subject, these persons were convinced of their truth, and, in consequence of that conviction, embraced the religion that was preached to them, at the expense of all their worldly prospects. It is because these miracles were

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attested and foretold by former prophecies, and confirmed by prophecies delivered at the time, many of which have since received their completion. It is because they were performed in support of a doctrine and a system of morality which could not be the invention of those who promulgated it, and could only proceed from the same divine origin to which alone the miracles can be ascribed. These are the reasons why, notwithstanding the great caution which ought to be exercised on such subjects, we are justified in giving credit to the miracles of the Gospel.

If these miracles had been solitary, unconnected facts,—if they had been performed for no purpose, or for one that was trifling and insignificant,—if they had been attended with no results,—then I am willing to admit that they would be entitled to little attention: and, indeed, in that case, it would not be of much consequence whether they were believed or not. But as the miracles were, in the first instance, a proof of the divine origin of the doctrines in support of which they were wrought, or rather a proof of the divine commission of him who performed them; so, in the present times, the excellence of the doctrine and the importance of its sanctions add a considerable value to the testimony by which the miracles are proved.

In all reasoning the mind argues from a known fact, from which it draws a probable, and, in some cases a necessary, inference. Thus, the first Christians, from the evidence of the miracles, the reality of which they could not call in question, inferred the

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supernatural powers of him that wrought them, and consequently the divine origin of the doctrines which he taught. To them the miracles were the facts; the divine authority of the doctrines was the inference they drew from those facts. We reason in a different process. The miracles are not to us an object of personal knowledge; but the doctrines we are competent to judge of; we see their excellence, and we argue that it is, if not absolutely impossible, at least highly improbable, that they should have been the invention of the persons by whom they were promulgated, and from whom they received the sanction of a future state; and on these grounds we are prepared to admit, that they were introduced by supernatural means. With us, therefore, the excellence of the morality and the doctrine of a future state are the facts we reason from; and the probability of miracles being wrought in support of them is the inference which we draw.

A divine revelation, in any case, must necessarily be miraculous: and it must be acknowledged by every one who is not an Atheist—and with an Atheist it would be absurd to argue about revelation—that the Being who established the laws of nature may alter or suspend them. But it may be said that, admitting the power, it is necessary to prove that such power has been exerted. Now we found the credibility of such an exertion, 1. On the plain, artless, consistent account delivered to us in the narratives of the Evangelists; 2. On the success of the Gospel, which was supported by those miracles;

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3. On the excellence of the doctrines and the importance of the revelations which those miracles were wrought to support; 4. On the twofold evidence from prophecy, on which this revelation rests: first, as the completion of former prophecies; and, secondly, as uttering prophecies which have been since accomplished.

It is usual to distinguish the evidence afforded by prophecy from the evidence afforded by miracles; but by separating them the proof is weakened: they both appear to me to constitute links in the same chain of argument, yielding support and assistance to each other; indeed, a prophecy is itself a miracle. From the success of the doctrines propagated by miracles, their harmony with former prophecies, and the accomplishment of the events foretold in the Gospels, I argue that there must have been a miraculous interposition, without which I can neither account for the coincidence between the prophecies and the events, nor for the origin and propagation of the sublime doctrine on which the religion of civilized Europe is founded.

III. The want of universality is another objection much insisted on; and, indeed, when urged in opposition to the creed of the Roman Catholics and some other Christian sects, it is, in my opinion, unanswerable; for I cannot conceive how those who believe that none but Christians can be saved, and that the rest of mankind will be condemned to everlasting misery, can reconcile such a dispensation with

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the mercy and justice of God. If such were, indeed, the doctrine of Christianity, that those who never heard of Christ are to be consigned to eternal damnation because they have not believed what they never so much as heard of, nor complied with a law which they never knew, or had any opportunity of knowing, it certainly may be justly objected, that the law upon which their final and eternal doom depends ought to have been made known to them; and that it is not only injustice but cruelty to condemn them to punishment because they did not believe what they had no possibility of being in the least acquainted with. It is consigning them to punishment, and the most dreadful of punishments, for what it was utterly impossible for them—and I use the word impossible in its strictest sense—to avoid; and in that case they were most undoubtedly predestinated, without any possibility of redemption, to eternal damnation.

If such a doctrine should be announced as the dispensation of a just and benevolent being by an angel descending from Heaven, it is so contrary to every idea we entertain of the justice and goodness of God, that we cannot for a moment believe that it can proceed from so perfect a being; and if we once give up the idea of the goodness and justice of God, we may as well turn Atheists at once: for if we do not believe that God is good and just, we can entertain no rational ideas concerning him, and we shall, in that case, have no idea left of any thing but his power.

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Those who entertain more just notions of Christianity will not find much weight in the objection; for though the knowledge of the Christian dispensation was confined to some, the benefits of it will extend to all; and as many die in all countries without knowing that their death is the consequence of Adam's fall, so many will rise again, although they are ignorant at present of the promise of a resurrection held out in the Gospel. In this there seems to me no greater difference than there is in the variety of God's dispensations towards mankind, with respect to their persons, their abilities, and fortunes; some are handsome, strong, and healthy, others are deformed, weak, and sickly; some are acute, learned, and intelligent, others stupid, ignorant, and dull; some are rich and powerful, others poor and oppressed; some are throughout their lives happy in their families, prosperous in their undertakings, and in the enjoyment of ease, plenty, and security—while others are friendless, unsuccessful in their projects, straitened in their circumstances, exposed to dangers, and inured to hardships. Even in Christian countries all men have not the same means of moral and religious instruction, and are therefore unequal in their means of spiritual improvement; so that in no case does there appear any thing like equality among men. Neither can such equality be reasonably expected.

If the rich man should complain that he is not a king, the poor man might complain that he is not rich. Nay, it might be carried farther: for if the

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Almighty is under the necessity of exercising a strict impartiality towards all his creatures, the worm might with as much justice complain that he was not a man, or a man that he was not an angel. They are all the work of his hands; and if he can make beings of different orders and capacities, why may he not make some difference between man and man?—always supposing that he will deal equitably with all, requiring no more than is consistent with the capacity of each; for, to suppose that he would punish a man because he had not the wisdom and perfections of an angel, or that he would torture a worm for not displaying the powers and intelligence of a man, would be as inconsistent with his justice as if he condemned one who had never heard of the Gospel for not believing the doctrines which it contains.

If we were taught by revelation, as some pretend, that faith in the Gospel is necessary to salvation, and, much more, that it is necessary to preserve men from eternal damnation, then it would be utterly impossible to reconcile the want of universality with the justice of God; but if, on the other hand, as I have before endeavoured to shew, the blessings which Christianity announces to mankind will be universal, if those who have lived and died in ignorance of it will, as well as its professors, be partakers of its benefits, and, like them, be restored to life and immortality,—if it be indeed true that "as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive,"—I see no objection to its want of universality; for, as many men have died who never heard of Adam's fall, so

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likewise they may rise again, though they never heard of Christ's resurrection.

IV. Perhaps one of the strongest objections to revelation arises from some portions of the Old Testament. Indeed, if Christianity depended on our believing every word which is there contained, I am very much afraid it would be difficult to establish its truth.

I shall consider these objections under three different heads: 1. The history of the creation, the fall, and the peopling of the world; 2. The Jewish ritual; and, 3. The order to destroy the Canaanites, and similar passages.

1. It cannot be denied that the Mosaic account of the creation is liable to considerable difficulties. It seems in itself very improbable that so extensive a globe as that which we inhabit should have been formed, and only one man and one woman placed in it to people it by their descendants; which, according to the common course of nature, must be a work of considerable time, more especially when we consider the longevity of mankind in the antediluvian æra; for the period of infancy must be supposed to have borne its due proportion to the length of life; and we find accordingly, that the time of marriage, as far as we can judge from the instances recorded, was deferred to an age proportionably late—so that, in fact, there were properly, in one sense, but two or three generations between the creation and the deluge; for as nine hundred years was no very uncommon age, it was

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possible that some of the contemporaries of Noah might have remembered and conversed with Adam, or at least with his sons,—that is, admitting the vulgar chronology. But the Mosaic history is extremely short and imperfect, and it is not improbable that, in the genealogies it contains, several intermediate links may have been omitted, which is certainly the case in some of them. So that the time which elapsed between the creation and the deluge may have been longer than is generally supposed. Indeed, if it had been so short, it would not, I apprehend, be easy to account for mankind having multiplied to such a degree as to fill the earth with inhabitants; and after the deluge—at least if it was universal—inasmuch as the great work of population was to begin over again, there is the same difficulty in accounting for the numerous societies of men which are so soon represented as subsisting. At the same time, I think we may reject the chronology of Moses without refusing credit to the leading facts of the history, which is evidently a very brief abstract of the times.

The fall of Adam has been the subject of so much discussion, that it would be endless to enter into an examination of all that has been alleged respecting it. Some, unable to reconcile the facts to their own ideas of reason, have got rid of the difficulty by believing it to be an allegory. This interpretation cannot, however, be admitted without absolutely overthrowing the whole system; for the fall of Adam is not only stated as a fact, but as the fundamental

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fact from whence all subsequent facts contained in that history derive their origin; so that, even if it were allegorical, it must, if it has any meaning at all, be illustrative of the disobedience of the first man, and of the sentence passed upon him in consequence of that disobedience.

2. I do not see any great weight in the objection arising from the Jewish ritual, which I think, at least as to its minutiæ, ought rather to be considered as the law of Moses than as immediately coming from God. It is indeed said, that God spake to Moses: this, however, I conceive need not be taken literally, as if God had uttered verbally every thing contained in these laws: it is sufficient, in my opinion, if we believe that God suggested their general purport; and, indeed, we find that no part of them was the object of equal veneration with the commandments, which were supposed to have been dictated immediately by God himself. This shews, evidently, that a great difference was made between what they received as coming immediately from the Deity and what Moses communicated to them by the divine suggestion.

3. With respect to the objection urged from the divine command for the destruction of the Canaanites, and other similar passages, it is an objection which I have never heard answered, I will not say satisfactorily, but even with any degree of plausibility. It is, in my opinion, unanswerable. Priestley has laboured, as well as others, in endeavouring to justify this transaction, and to reconcile it with the justice of God.

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There is a very remarkable passage by that author in extenuation of this severity—"That though expressed in absolute terms, the order was supposed by some to have been conditional in fact, and that the lives of the Canaanites were to have been spared upon their submission, and especially on their forsaking idolatry."—What would the Doctor have said if all the Unitarians had been condemned to death, but mercifully spared on condition of their subscribing to the Athanasian Creed? I imagine he would not have much applauded such a dispensation. In fact, all these attempts to soften and explain away the facts, prove that they will not admit of vindication.

That God, who may dispose at his will of the lives of all his creatures, had a right to punish the Canaanites with death for their delinquencies, and that he might use the sword of their enemies with as much justice and propriety as a pestilence or famine, or any other kind of death, is certain and indisputable, but unfortunately is nothing to the purpose. The question is, whether God could, as a moral governor, give orders in absolute contradiction to the precepts which he had promulgated as the laws from which the people were not to deviate, as well as in opposition to every sentiment of benevolence and humanity implanted by himself in the heart of man. If there is any such thing as moral right and wrong, it will scarcely be disputed that cruelty to the vanquished, oppression to those who are in our power, a refusal of mercy to those who have no other hope, and the indiscriminate infliction of death on a prostrate

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and unresisting enemy, are actions that exhibit human nature in its most savage and barbarous aspect. These suggestions of the law of nature were further confirmed by the laws which were revealed by God himself. It makes one of the ten commandments: elsewhere it is said, that whoever sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed. How, then, can an order so repugnant to every natural and revealed law be supposed to emanate from the author of those laws? Priestley talks of the good effects resulting from this severe and inhuman act: this is like the theory of certain politicians, that private vices are public benefits. This theory, however, is the less unreasonable of the two; for in the administration of states it is not always possible to effect any great benefit without some toleration of evil. But to argue from the feeble and imperfect government of man to the dispensations of an all-wise and omnipotent God, is absurd in the extreme. Can we suppose that his power was so weak, or his wisdom so limited, that he could not effect his purposes without compelling his people to the transgression of his own laws?

Priestley also argues, that the hand of God would not have been so visible, if the destruction of the Canaanites had been effected by a flood or an earthquake, or by fire from heaven—as in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah—as when the punishment was inflicted by the hands of the Israelites. Strange position! Let me only ask, which bears the most visible marks of the hand of God, the destruction of

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the Americans by the Spaniards, or the universal deluge?

In answer to all these objections, arising from the Old Testament, I shall observe in general, that the defenders of Christianity often undertake too much, and by endeavouring to support what is by no means essential to their cause, they weaken the evidence of what is really susceptible of proof. I think Paley has put this point on its true footing, by admitting that Christianity does not depend on the truth of every particular recorded in the Jewish Scriptures. The supposed necessity of receiving every word contained in them as an article of faith has arisen from the supposition that every word in the Old and New Testament was written by inspiration—a supposition which is totally at variance with the internal evidence of those writings.

It is plain, from numerous passages in the New Testament, that though the Apostles were occasionally distinguished by divine communications and endowed with supernatural powers, yet they were not always under the influence of immediate inspiration. It was some time before they understood that they were commissioned to preach the Gospel to the heathens as well as the Jews, and this was revealed to Peter in a vision; which, if he had been always inspired, would surely have been altogether unnecessary. It was a matter of doubt among the Apostles whether the heathen converts were bound to observe the law of Moses before they were admitted to baptism. We hear of a dispute between

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St. Peter and St. Paul; which could not have happened had they both been always inspired. And in their exhortations, the Apostles make a distinction between what they advise as a matter of opinion, and what they deliver in a more peremptory style as a doctrine revealed to them. This shews that on many occasions they were left to their own judgment, and that it was only occasionally, and when necessity required, that they were assisted by divine inspiration.

Even divine inspiration would be no security for the accuracy of the Scriptures as they are handed down to us; for though the original writers should have been inspired, yet unless the same inspiration was extended to every transcriber and translator of those books, many alterations or corruptions might, through inadvertence or design, have crept into the sacred text.

The Jewish Scriptures are certainly not transmitted to us with the same authority, nor with the same degree of credit, as the writings of the New Testament. It is not easy to ascertain the time or the persons by whom many of the books were written: they were in the custody of the priesthood for a great length of time: many of them being purely historical, are therefore to be considered in the same manner as other ancient histories; and we may reasonably withhold our belief from some particulars without rejecting the whole,—which is the judgment we form every day on reading the early annals of Greece and Rome.

I do not mean, however, to infer that the miracu-

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lous events recorded in the Old Testament deserve no more regard than the events of the same nature which we find in other histories. The very peculiar government, religion, and customs, of the Jewish nation, the superior knowledge which, notwithstanding their inferiority to the rest of the world in every other branch of learning and improvement, they possessed respecting God and his attributes, are strong arguments that they did not obtain their religious instruction from the same source whence other nations derived their absurd superstitions, and give no inconsiderable weight to their pretensions of having received it from the Deity himself,—and the accomplishment of several of the predictions of their prophets proves that their claims to prophecy were not unfounded. We may, therefore, give credit to predictions, when we find them confirmed by the events, without believing every thing recorded in their annals. We may believe that they were a people set apart from other nations by the immediate providence of God, because this is attested by their whole history, and more especially by their continuing to this day to subsist as a distinct people, notwithstanding their dispersion. As it appears that they were appointed as the instruments of communicating the Divine dispensations to mankind, and that for this purpose they were placed in a peculiar manner under the especial guidance of Providence, it is not unreasonable to believe those extraordinary facts transmitted down through them, for the promulgation of which their whole economy seems to have been insti-

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tuted, especially when those facts are confirmed by the Gospel. The facts I principally allude to are the creation of man and the fall of our first parents, which cannot be rejected by a believer in the Gospel, as the resurrection from death is there represented as a redemption, through the obedience of the second Adam, from the penalty incurred by mankind in consequence of the disobedience of the first.

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CHAPTER XII.

ON THE ADOPTION OF CHRISTIANITY.

As I am not writing to support a system, or merely to make the most of an argument, I am ready to admit that the evidence in favour of revelation consists merely in probability, though, in my opinion, such strong probability as amounts nearly to moral certainty. I make this admission, because it appears to me infinitely more probable that Providence should miraculously interpose with a divine revelation, than that a few ignorant and uneducated men should have formed so extravagant a design as to change the religion of the world by unfounded attempts to impose on the credulity of mankind, —that men, plain and artless as they appear to have been, should have conceived the most artful system of fraud and imposture,—that men without education or intellectual abilities should have devised a system of morality more pure, more perfect, extensive and unexceptionable than any that the wisdom of the wisest philosophers had ever produced—that they should, on the authority of their own affirmation,—obscure, insignificant, and contemptible as they were—have

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presumed to sanction their system by the promise of a future state of immortality,—or that any body could have believed them if they had;—that, in proof of their authority, they should have appealed to the miracles they performed, when, in fact, their pretensions to miraculous powers were fraudulent and false—that the fulfilment of the prophecies was either not true or merely accidental, and that the prophecies which they themselves foretold, and which have since been accomplished, were accidental and fortuitous,—a combination of all these circumstances appears to me more miraculous than the revelation which we are desired to believe.

However strong the conviction arising from these considerations, yet I think it by no means necessary—nor indeed is it possible—to feel the same absolute certainty of the truth of revelation that we do of our own existence: it is not in the nature of things that men should have such a persuasion in reality, whatever they may pretend or fancy; and those who are best qualified to form a sound judgment, knowing the weakness of our faculties and the fallibility of human testimony, are fully sensible that, notwithstanding the conclusions they draw, on what they believe to be reasonable grounds, still it is possible that they may be mistaken. But if, after having considered the subject with all the attention they are capable of, they are of opinion that the arguments in favour of Christianity outweigh those that are brought against it, and in consequence of that persuasion endeavour, to the best of their abilities, to

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obey its precepts, and make it the guide of their actions,—I consider these men, even though they should not be able absolutely to silence every doubt, to be far better Christians than those who hastily receive it without any previous examination, merely because it was the first lesson they were taught in their infancy.

It must be confessed, at the same time, that the stronger our conviction of its truth, the greater will be the comforts we shall derive from the practice of its duties, and the more powerful its influence on our conduct. It is not, therefore, a matter of indifference what degree of faith we give; but, at the same time, if we yield implicit credence to what is proposed to us without consulting our judgment, we run every risk of being led astray. This is, however, the method adopted by the great majority of mankind. They call themselves sincere believers; they never doubt, because they have never inquired into the subject. And for this conduct they are not to blame; most of them have neither leisure nor capacity to form a sound judgment: on the contrary, we commonly find that, when the ignorant and uneducated attempt to inquire into the grounds and nature of religion, they entangle themselves in all the labyrinths of superstition and enthusiasm.

The generality of mankind must receive their religion as they do their laws, from authority. I do not mean that they are to be kept in ignorance, and the means of information withheld from them: far from it. The more diffused religious instruction the

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better; and particularly if the attention is turned to plain, intelligible subjects, which will refine and correct the heart without puzzling and bewildering the understanding.

But after every method has been adopted to spread religious information more generally among the lower ranks, still it must be admitted that few of them will be qualified to inquire into the first principles, and that they must receive the grounds of their religion chiefly from the information of others; and the greatest part will have neither inclination, time, nor abilities, to carry their researches further than the instructions given them,—which, consequently, they receive upon trust. The national religion ought, therefore, to be as simple, plain, and rational as possible; all questions of mere controversial theology should be banished from its creed, and its doctrines confined to those fundamental points on which are built the hopes and duties of Christians,—leaving it to men of more leisure, better capacities, and greater information, to draw their own conclusions on all less obvious and more controverted points, without endeavouring to impose them on others as articles of faith.

Whoever feels any doubts of the truth of Christianity, ought to direct his inquiries to these three material questions: 1. What is Christianity? 2. What are its evidences? 3. What religion can be substituted for it?

1. As far as my own observations extend, the objec-

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tions of infidels, as I have before had occasion to observe, are not so much levelled against the evidences of Christianity as the credibility of the doctrines it is represented to contain. The first thing, therefore, incumbent on a candid inquirer is, to examine whether those tenets which form the principal obstacle to his faith are, indeed, the real doctrines of Jesus.

His first object should be to separate the revelation of God from the inventions of men. And if, on an impartial investigation, he is convinced that the doctrines to which they could not but refuse their assent, as being impossible in themselves, utterly incredible or irreconcilable to the attributes of God, are not, as they are represented to be, the genuine doctrines of the Gospel, but the corruptions by which the Gospel has been adulterated by the ignorance, the passions, and the policy of men—then I conceive the greatest difficulty will be removed; and when once Christianity is reduced to a rational system, consistent with reason, and with our conceptions of God, the next question will be, whether there is reason to believe, from the evidence adduced in its support, that it was really what it professes to be, a divine revelation.

2. It must be confessed that the Gospel narrative stands on the strongest historical evidence. It proceeds not from one, but several eye-witnesses, the friends, the companions, the disciples of Jesus, or at least from persons immediately connected with them.

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Their accounts, though they vary in the manner and circumstances of telling the story, agree in every material and important point: there is exactly that variation and coincidence that might be expected from different eye-witnesses relating the same events. The mode, the expression, the order of the narrative would be different; but if they were accurate and faithful, the facts, at least those of most weight and importance, would be the same. Such is the variation and harmony of the Evangelists. We have likewise the original correspondence of many of the most distinguished of the Apostles, so interspersed with local and temporary circumstances as to leave no doubt of their authenticity.

There is, perhaps, no event in ancient or modern history that stands on stronger testimony. It may, however, be objected, that as this is a fact so different from those which happen in the course of nature, it is not entitled to belief merely on the same testimony which is sufficient to substantiate any ordinary occurrence; that as it is so uncommon and improbable in itself, it requires a proportionate degree of evidence. I admit the propriety of the objection, and in answer to it I shall observe, that in addition to the strong historical testimony which revelation derives from eye-witnesses, it is likewise supported by other peculiar and appropriate evidence, resulting from its extraordinary and wonderful nature.

The prophecies by which it was foretold, prophecies acknowledged and revered by its most determined

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opponents; the miracles to which the historians of the Gospels appeal, and which were never contradicted; and the predictions in that Gospel which have since been verified;—all these, together or separately, afford the strongest confirmation to the testimony of the Evangelists, and thus the miraculous events they record are established by evidence equally miraculous and extraordinary.

3. If we reject Christianity, what religion shall we substitute in its place? I by no means mean to argue that we should receive a false religion, because we have nothing better to place in its room; but it is usual for those who wish to depreciate revelation to cry up and exaggerate the value of natural faith. But I believe it generally happens that the most acute and sagacious seceders from the established religion, when they come to examine more narrowly into the nature and foundation of natural religion, soon discover that, after it has been deprived of those lights which are borrowed from revelation, it is at best an obscure and uncertain guide; and that the same process of reasoning which led them to doubt of the truth and disbelieve the evidences of revelation, will soon induce them to question the obligations imposed on them by natural religion, and drive them at last into irreligion and universal scepticism.

There never existed, as I have before shewn, and I may venture to add there never will exist, any community professing natural religion. The mutual relation of man to man will, indeed, always establish

some sort of morality, and the light of nature would no doubt lead us to the knowledge of a first cause. But beyond this, it is impossible to advance without the aid of revelation: with respect to our relations to that cause, reason will give very little light. We cannot avoid confessing the power of God, and as far as good prevails over evil here on earth, we shall be persuaded of his benevolence; but of our duties to him (except the vague ideas of fear and gratitude) we can form no distinct notions; and if our duties were ever so clearly ascertained, where is the motive to induce us to the performance of them? I cannot imagine any strong enough to induce a man to sacrifice any of his temporal interests to his duty, but the expectation of reward either in this or another life. Experience teaches us that we cannot depend on receiving any such rewards in this world; and although many who have been brought up in the Christian faith have imagined that the doctrine of a future life was discoverable without the aid of revelation, yet I think I have shewn, in the earlier part of this treatise, that all the expectations of it which ever have been, or ever could be, afforded by the light of nature are dark, dubious, and uncertain—resting on no solid foundation, exercising no influence on the conduct.

It must be admitted, that, whatever arguments may be adduced independently of revelation, they cannot go beyond the *probability* of a future state. They must always leave doubts even in the most sanguine minds—as we find they did among the ancient philosophers—of the certainty of its existence, and

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respecting its nature and duration they can give us no light whatever. It is manifestly not improbable that what has had a beginning may have an end; and there is no more reason in the nature of things why our duration should be eternal, than there was for our existing from all eternity. It is in vain to talk of the spirituality and consequent immortality of the soul; for whatever may be the nature of our existence, we know that it derives it origin from the will of its Creator, who may at his pleasure resolve it again into the nonentity from whence he drew it forth: our observations on the birth, progress, and decay of man, and the analogy of his nature with that of brutes and even of plants,—which grow and strengthen till they reach maturity, then gradually decay, and finally perish as their organs are impaired by age,—are certainly not favourable to the hope so fondly entertained of the natural immortality of the soul of man.

Without the belief of a future state, I cannot conceive how religion, under whatever form, can exist to any practical purpose. There may be processions, there may be ceremonies, there may be superstitions,—all the outside, all the abuses, all the corruptions of religion,—but its spirit, its beneficial influence, its practical operation, must be null.—These notions may be called mercenary and narrow, but, as far as my observation has gone, they are founded on the nature of man: happiness is his great object, and he will never give up a considerable advantage but in the hopes, by that sacrifice, of attaining a greater good. All legislation and all

systems of religion, whether true or false, are addressed to our hopes and fears, and hold forth either rewards or punishments. With these feelings, I am fully persuaded that, as all our hopes of a future state are founded on revelation, if we reject that, we can have no religion at all.

Christianity therefore, even if its truth were liable to some degree of uncertainty, ought to be the choice of every reflecting man. It is undoubtedly favourable to moral government in this world; and it has never been pretended that an observance of its precepts will interfere with our happiness hereafter, upon any other system of religion which holds out the prospect of a future life.

Whatever may be thought of the doctrines of Christianity, it must be allowed that its precepts are wise, just, and conducive to the welfare of society; and it must likewise be admitted, that the hopes of future happiness and the fears of future punishment are the strongest motives that any religion can propose for a compliance with its precepts; and, consequently, no religion was ever so well calculated as Christianity to improve the morals and promote the happiness of man. If it were a human contrivance, still it is so beneficial, so salutary, so superior to any other institution, that it ought to be encouraged and supported by every friend to order, virtue, and morality. Until, therefore, those who reject it shall establish a system of natural religion that shall hold forth stronger motives to virtue, better grounded hopes of future happiness, better regulations for the welfare of society, and stronger sanctions for its

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precepts,—I would advise every man to be cautious how he abandons a religion, which, notwithstanding all the corruptions and abuses by which it has been deformed, has contributed more to improve the morals and promote the happiness of mankind than any institution that ever was established in the world.

I know it is said, that belief is not in our power; and that we cannot assent to doctrines which our judgment refuses to admit. When urged in opposition to the extravagant notions of faith which have but too much prevailed among Christians, the objection is just; but, in the rational view of it which I have endeavoured to lay down, it appears to me to be of very little weight.

Christianity is a practical religion; all the precepts of Christ are of a moral nature. He always preached repentance and amendment of life: humility, charity, piety, sobriety, and temperance, are the virtues he invariably inculcates; and on the conduct of men in this life he represents their happiness or misery in the next to depend. "Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." Matt. vii. 21. And wherever he gives us any representation of the final judgment, he does not separate believers from unbelievers, the orthodox from the heretic, or the Christian from the Pagan, —but the charitable from the uncharitable, the just from the unjust, the good from the wicked.

Whence, then, it may be asked, proceeds the stress laid upon faith in some parts of the New

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Testament?—from the necessity of adopting those means which are necessary to the attainment of the end proposed. The whole of the doctrine of Christianity absolutely necessary to be believed, may, perhaps, be reduced to this single proposition, "*That God at the last day will judge the world in righteousness.*" A persuasion of the truth of this one article of faith will be sufficient to draw every well-disposed mind from evil courses, and induce it to devote itself to the practice of those virtues which will secure its eternal felicity.

Unless we believe in a future state, all arguments drawn from it will have no influence on our conduct; neither can it be supposed that we should adopt a doctrine of so important a nature, and which it is impossible for human reason to discover, on the bare authority of any man whatever, still less on the declaration of a carpenter's son. To believe, therefore, a future judgment to any practical purpose, we must be satisfied that it was announced by divine authority, and thence the necessity of faith; for we cannot be expected to be influenced by what we do not believe to be true.

Mere unbelief is so far from being in itself an unpardonable sin, that St. Paul, when he condemns himself for his persecution of the Christians, mentions it as some mitigation or excuse of that offense;—"I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly, in unbelief."—According to the notions of some extravagant sects, his unbelief would have been not only an aggravation of his fault, but an unpardonable sin of itself.

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CHAPTER XIII.

ON CHRISTIAN RITES AND OBSERVANCES.

If the views contained in the last chapter respecting the nature of faith are correct, and if it is true—as I trust will be admitted by all rational professors of the Gospel—that every man who believes that Christ was sent by God to announce a future state of retribution, and who, in consequence of that belief, leads a godly, righteous, and sober life, and complies, as far as human weakness will allow, with all the precepts of the Gospel, is in every respect a good Christian, and may expect to be a partaker in the future state of happiness announced by Jesus,—then it cannot be denied that the belief of that proposition is sufficient to ensure his salvation; and that consequently all additional articles of faith, of what kind soever, whether true or false, are at least unnecessary. On this principle Christianity contains only one point which can be called a mystery or deviation from the natural course of events, that is, the supernatural revelation of the doctrine of a future state; the authenticity of which revelation is proved by the miraculous works performed by Jesus and his Apostles in attestation of its divine authority.

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If this single point is sufficient to ensure a man's salvation, provided his conduct is conformable to his belief, it follows necessarily that it is sufficient to answer all the purposes of revelation, which has no other object but the salvation of mankind. Why, then, introduce a number of incomprehensible dogmas to puzzle the understanding and revolt the judgment? —dogmas upon which mankind have always been divided in opinion, and which, far from answering any useful end, have been the cause of disputes, and uncharitableness, and bloodshed, for so many centuries. When all sects are agreed that Christ was commissioned to announce the will of God to mankind, where is the necessity for any church to decide whether he was a God, an angel, or a man?

When God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, would it not have been absurd in the Israelites to have divided themselves into sects, and called one another heretics, because some might be of opinion that God was personally present in the bush,—while others might maintain that it was only a manifestation of his power, in order to convince Moses that the communication was divine?

If there is, indeed, a revelation of the will and design of God, then, whatever may be the instrument through which it has pleased him to make the communication, it is equally entitled to our acceptance: and although there are, and in all probability there always will be, various opinions respecting the nature, office, and dignity of Christ, yet since all agree that he came to declare the will of God, why should not

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every one be left to his own opinions on those doubtful points? Is it not enough that all should be unanimous as to the obligation we are under of obeying the will of God which Christ has declared to us, and of believing the promises which God has made to us through him? Why should not Christianity be reduced to the same simplicity as Mahomedanism, that the Almighty is God, and Jesus Christ is his prophet? If the belief of this, and a practice in conformity with that belief, is sufficient to ensure salvation, why introduce a number of unnecessary and incomprehensible articles?

Let mutual charity be the bond of union between Christians of different opinions in religion, and as they are unanimous in the main and essential point, let them allow others the liberty which they claim for themselves of exercising their own judgment on other questions upon which the best and worthiest men may differ without any impeachment of their virtue or sincerity. Instead of the Trinitarian accusing the Unitarian of impiety, or the Unitarian reviling the Trinitarian as an idolater, let them both follow the dictates of their own reason, without presuming to impose their opinions upon each other. Let each do justice to the good intention of the other, and put the most favourable construction on what he considers to be his mistakes. Let the Unitarian reflect, that, when the Trinitarian worships Jesus, he only worships him as being one and the same with the everlasting God, so that he cannot properly be said to worship another God; and if he

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is under a mistake, it is at best a pardonable error of the understanding, and not a wilful transgression of the heart. On the other hand, when the Trinitarian accuses the Unitarian of impiety, because he refuses that worship to Christ which he conceives ought to be paid to him as the second person in the Trinity, he should consider that the Unitarian worships the great and almighty God in all his omnipotence and immensity; and that, if Christ is really one and the same with the Father, he cannot worship the Father without at the same time worshipping Christ.

The great misfortune is, that all sects lay more stress on the insignificant opinions in which they differ from each other than on the more essential points in which they all concur. Hence their established modes of worship are framed with a view to exclude every one who does not believe exactly as they do, rather than on the comprehensive plan of including all who assent to the great doctrines necessary to constitute a Christian. If every doubtful tenet were strictly excluded, there would still remain doctrines enough, in which all parties are united, to form a rational and universal worship.

A Protestant cannot with a safe conscience join in the Roman Catholic ritual; but there is nothing in the liturgy of the Church of England that could exclude the most scrupulous adherent of the Church of Rome. In like manner, the Unitarian cannot join in the ritual of the Church of England, because to worship as God a being whom he believes to have

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been a man like himself, or at least a created being in every respect inferior to God, would in him be idolatry: but, on the contrary, a member of the Church of England might join in the worship of Unitarians; for though he believes more than the Unitarian, it is not necessary that his faith should always be stretched to the utmost, or that he should refuse to join with him on points in which they both concur, because there are a few subjects of minor importance on which they happen to differ.

A community of worship, however, is so little to be expected, that we find not only the Unitarians and other sects dissenting from the Established Church because they cannot assent to all the doctrines which make part of its worship, but we find others likewise seceding from its communion, not because they object to any of its tenets, but because it does not countenance some mysterious notions of theirs which they imagine to be necessary to the perfection at least, if not to the very being, of a Christian; and it is a melancholy fact, that these exaggerated opinions are daily gaining ground under the various denominations of Methodists, Calvinists, and Evangelical Christians. Little disposed as I am to concur in their visionary notions, I entertain no doubt that most of them are sincere, and act from truly conscientious motives; and I believe it will be generally admitted that they have manifested a greater degree of zeal, industry, and order in propagating their doctrines, than the Established Church or the more rational Dissenters; and I am of opinion,

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that what sense of religion remains among the lower ranks of the people is, in a great measure, to be attributed to their efforts and zeal. Indeed, the ardent but often erroneous effusions of enthusiasm have always been found to have had a far more powerful sway over the imagination of the people than the cool suggestions and dry deductions of reason.

While men differ so widely, it is scarcely possible that they should be brought to unite in any community of worship, even though the interested policy of those who enjoy a monopoly under the present establishment should oppose no obstacle to so comprehensive a scheme: this, however, is hardly to be expected from them. Individuals may be disinterested; bodies of men seldom, I may say never, are. Wherever the advantage of a community is concerned, the interest of the individuals who compose it is supported by what assumes the tone of public spirit, but is, in fact, nothing more than *esprit de corps*. This remark is peculiarly applicable to religious communities; for while they are, in fact, contending for the exclusive temporal advantages of their church, they ostentatiously represent themselves as standing up in defense of the essential doctrines of their religion.

Whatever favourable sentiments I may entertain with respect to the doctrines of the Unitarians and their exclusive adoration of one God, there is one point in their worship which I cannot approve. I

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am decidedly of opinion that there should be some established form of prayer, from which no minister should be allowed to depart. It is too great a confidence to be reposed in any one man to permit him to use whatever prayers he may choose to select; and thus to leave it in his power to impose his own crude and ill-digested ideas, and even his erroneous views, in the solemn act of worship offered up to the Almighty in the name of the whole congregation.

That, however, is not the only nor perhaps the principal objection. It is difficult for the greatest part of a congregation to follow with any degree of devotion the extemporary effusions of a minister; whereas, when he is obliged to adhere to a prescribed and well-known ritual, the ideas of his hearers will join with perfect ease in every part of the service. And as in large assembles it is not always easy for all present to hear every word that is said by the minister, that deficiency is supplied by the assistance of a book, which is a great help to the attention, especially of the lower and ignorant part of the audience; besides that it affords them the means of preparation, if they choose to refer to it previously to their assisting at the divine service. All these advantages are lost by leaving the choice of the prayers to the discretion of the minister.

In most, if not all, Christian communities, the celebration of the Lord's supper has been esteemed the most solemn and essential part of their worship. If we were to form our opinion from what we read

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respecting its institution, it would not, in my opinion, appear to possess this superior degree of importance. It is mentioned only once in the Gospel, and the precept which Jesus gave to his disciples, "do this in remembrance of me," seems rather intended as a peculiar memorial of friendship, than a religious precept of universal obligation, or an injunction of the greatest weight and importance to all future believers. Indeed, the solemnity with which Christ celebrated his last supper upon earth seems to have had for its object to intimate the death and sufferings which he was so soon to undergo, and of which the Apostles were still ignorant. In no other part of the Gospel do we find any the most distant reference to this, which has since been reckoned the most solemn act of worship.

St. Paul and the rest of the Apostles never, in any of their Epistles, lay any express injunction on their disciples to observe this ceremony, as they do with respect to prayer and public worship. Indeed, it is mentioned only by St. Paul, and that incidentally. He reproves the Corinthians for converting a religious ceremony into an occasion of excess and drunkenness. This reproof of the Apostle's shews, indeed, that it was a rite introduced from the very beginning of Christianity, and that it was an ordinance universally received and approved by the Apostles themselves, as a memorial of the death and sufferings of Christ. There does not appear, however, to have been any mysterious sanctity ascribed to it. Nay, the very indecent manner in which it was celebrated by the Corinthians is far from affording any reason to think

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that they considered it an act of more than common seriousness or solemnity—it was, in fact, nothing more than a declaration of their faith by joining in a commemoration of the death of Christ in whom they believed.

This simple rite was, however, in the course of time, converted into a sacrament and mystery, and has even been represented as the most essential Christian duty. Indeed, it is not surprising that it should have been deemed a matter of great importance; for as it was a confession and declaration of faith, it became the distinction between a believer and a Pagan: it was the criterion and evidence of being a Christian, and was therefore looked upon with respect and veneration.

The importance, solemnity, and mysterious advantages attributed to this ceremony continued gradually to increase, till the doctrine of Transubstantiation brought the matter to its acmé. It would be a great mistake to suppose that Transubstantiation originated in the council by which it was first recognized as one of the fundamental doctrines of the Church. No such doctrine would have been imposed unless the minds of men had been previously disposed to receive it.

The difficulty of eradicating superstitious opinions when they have once been firmly rooted in men's minds, is strikingly exemplified by the fact, that Transubstantiation, notwithstanding its palpable absurdity, was very slowly and cautiously attacked at the time of the reformation. Luther's opinions on

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the subject were far from clear, and he was inclined rather to modify the doctrine than to reject it altogether. Some Protestant churches, even at the present day, though they reject the literal doctrine, adopt all its mysterious effects: they retain the inference, though they deny the premises. They ascribe the same beneficial effects to the spiritual operation of the Eucharist which the Catholics believe to attach to it as a partaking of the real body and blood of Christ; and in the catechism of the Church of England there is an article which goes very far towards asserting the doctrine of Transubstantiation—for I cannot understand how it can otherwise be said that the body and blood of Christ are *verily and indeed taken* and received by the faithful in the Lord's supper.

Prayer and worship are, beyond comparison, more strongly inculcated, both in the Gospels and the Epistles, than the celebration of the Eucharist, and constitute, in my opinion, a far more necessary part of our religious duties. But though the peculiar importance attached to the administration of the communion does not appear to be founded on any Scripture authority, but, on the contrary, to have derived its origin from the doctrine of the real presence, yet I am far from condemning it; nor should I wish to see the veneration which is paid to it in any degree diminished. The generality of mankind are not philosophers: it is necessary to strike the imagination, in order to touch the heart; and I see no reason why we should reject the

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beneficial effects which a religious ceremony is capable of producing, even though we abjure as superstitious the foundation upon which it was erected.

As the celebration of the Eucharist is a serious and open declaration of our adhering to the religion of Christ, and forms, indeed, the great line of separation between a Christian and an infidel, it can scarcely be observed with too much solemnity; indeed, the greater the solemnity the more strongly will it recall to our remembrance the duties as well as the hopes of a Christian. It will in a most forcible manner draw our attention to the death of Jesus, who laid down his life in attestation of the doctrines he was sent to reveal—doctrines by which we are taught the way to life and immortality. In order to add to the solemnity of the effect, I think it ought not to be celebrated too often; for whatever is done frequently becomes habitual and a matter of course.

The prejudice that it is an enormous sin to approach the sacred table while guilty of any particular crime or indulging in any favourite sin, is at least an innocent prejudice, and may be the means of leading to repentance and amendment of life.

This feeling, indeed, seems to be not altogether without foundation. We are taught by Scripture to avoid intruding into the presence of God while we are uncharitably disposed towards our neighbours. —Matt. v. 23: "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the

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altar, and go thy way—first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." And though it is certain that the same motives which deter a man from appearing at the communion table ought to operate as powerfully to prevent his drawing near to God in prayer and supplication, yet, if a man is more effectually restrained from iniquity by the dread of an unworthy communion, let us not remove this salutary restraint.

Of Baptism I shall say very little. On the first propagation of Christianity it was the mode adopted to distinguish its converts, and as some mode was necessary, that was as good as any other; though I cannot find any mystery in it. It was so far an important ceremony, that the person who was baptized abjured his former faith or infidelity, and became a professor of the religion of Christ. Whether the same necessity exists at present for observing this ceremony, might, perhaps, admit of doubt; as it is, however, perfectly harmless, I do not see that there can be any objection to it; on the contrary, it is a public initiation of the person baptized into the community of Christians. Whether baptism should be administered to infants, or deferred till they come to years of discretion, is a question that would admit of much dispute. The Church of England has, perhaps, adopted the best principle by having the infant baptized and the adult confirmed. The practice, however, appears in some measure defective, as the baptism of the infant is the part of the institution by

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far the most attended to, and the most regularly performed, the confirmation being a mere form, which even is often neglected. I should be inclined to reverse the method of proceeding, and make the baptism of the infant a mere presentation of the child as a future member of the Christian community, without the introduction of sponsors; and when he comes to years of discretion, I would have him initiated into the church in a more solemn manner, thus making his profession of Christianity his own choice, and the result of deliberate reflection.

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CONCLUSION.

I shall now close this inquiry, in which my principal endeavour has been to establish three propositions:—

I. The first is, that Christianity, properly understood, contains nothing repugnant to common sense.

When a Trinity in Unity—when the divinity of a person who expired on the cross—when the doctrines of transubstantiation and absolute predestination, and other mysterious and incomprehensible dogmas respecting faith and grace, are added to the simple picture of Christianity, it is not wonderful that the reflecting and sincere inquirer after truth should altogether withhold his assent.

When a philosopher attempted to prove that there could be no such a thing as motion, because a body must either move where it is or where it is not, his hearer, who was a shrewd sensible man, instead of following his sophistical reasoning, refuted him by walking across the room. No blame to the philosophical inquirer into the truth is due for not wasting his time in refuting arguments produced in support of doctrines which are manifestly absurd and contradictory; but what I

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would recommend, and which is not often attended to, is to examine, in the first instance, whether these absurd and contradictory doctrines really constitute a part of the Christian religion, or whether they are not corruptions introduced by the fallibility and the presumption of man. We generally derive our first notions of Christianity rather from the particular institutions of the sect in which we live than from the Gospel itself. Every man is familiar with his liturgy before he is tolerably versed in the contents of Scripture; and having received his rudiments of religious knowledge from the former, he imagines that he sees in the Gospel the doctrines which he has been taught by his church or sect to venerate as fundamental. In Roman Catholic countries, where Christianity is most corrupt, and especially in those where no dissidents are tolerated, there is no choice left between superstition and infidelity; whereas, if other sects were allowed to exist, many of those that reject the Romish superstition would, instead of abandoning Christianity altogether, enrol themselves in those communities.

Protestant Churches are willing enough to admit these views to be correct with respect to the Catholics; but I am afraid there are but few churches of their own to whom it may not be extorted.

Mutato nomine de te
Fabula narratur.

the sincere inquirer therefore, separate the opinions of men from the revelation of God, and

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without paying the least attention to the dogmas of any particular church, seek for instruction from that book which all Christian communities acknowledge to be the authentic record of divine truth. If he should there find that the main part, if not the whole, of the Christian dispensation consists in the following proposition—"That the man Christ Jesus was sent by the Almighty to announce the doctrine of a future state of retribution, and to teach us how we may secure eternal happiness by our conduct in this world; and that he, by the miracles which he performed while on earth, and by his rising again from the dead, proved that his mission was, in fact, divine, and that consequently his promises were true"—he must acknowledge that there is nothing in this inconsistent with reason or contradictory in itself.

It may perhaps be objected, that, from the view which I have taken of the Christian religion, it loses much of the awful and stupendous dignity which it exhibits in the mysterious representations of those who call themselves orthodox; that the sufferings of a mere man, however distinguished and dignified, can bear no competition with those of a divine being, of the son of God, nay of God himself; all this I am willing to admit:—but we must not be wise above what is written—we must state things as they are, and not with a view to dramatic effect; and if the doctrine I have endeavoured to establish operates less forcibly on our imagination, it is certainly more satisfactory to our reason.

It should be remembered, that it has always been

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the custom with men to magnify the objects of their reverence and esteem. This was the source of Pagan idolatry, and I am afraid the same propensity has found its way into Christian communities. Hence in Catholic countries the worship of Christ is more religiously attended to than that of God the Father; and the adoration paid to the Holy Virgin has almost superseded the worship of the Father and the Son; more prayers are addressed to her than to the three persons of the Trinity: nor is that all; they have, by the invocation of saints and the reverence paid to their reliques, advanced them to the dignity of Dii minorum gentium;—and it is not wonderful that, when such idolatrous worship was offered to the Virgin and the Saints, divine honours should have been paid to Jesus Christ.

II. When the inquirer finds that these and other extravagant doctrines are no part of Christianity itself, it will be worth his while to examine whether the evidence in favour of this extraordinary interposition is such as will warrant his assent. Difficulties alone are not sufficient to justify his incredulity; difficulties there are and must be in all religions: and even in what is called natural religion, there are some stronger in every respect than can be objected to the plain and rational system of Christianity I have delineated. For instance, what is there in that system so incomprehensible as the ideas of eternity, or so unaccountable as the origin of evil, when viewed by no other light than that of natural reason? If, therefore, the inquirer after truth will concede so

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far as to admit the possibility of such a system, and to examine the grounds on which it is founded, he will, in my opinion, find that the evidence in its favour is strong, powerful, and not easily to be controverted; and that is the second proposition I have endeavoured to establish.

III. The third object which I proposed to myself was to shew that there is, in reality, no alternative between Christianity and no religion at all. The man who, after diligent inquiry, rejects Christianity, will not easily be led to embrace Judaism, or to submit to the authority of Mahomet; still less will he think of restoring the heathen mythology;—nor will the superstitions of the Eastern world claim that faith which is denied to the religion of Jesus.—No; but natural religion is the refuge which opens its gates to the deserter from the Christian faith. It is, indeed, sufficiently extensive to contain deserters of every description: but it wants the very essence—the only real sanction of religion—the assurance of a future state.

Setting aside what we are taught by revelation, we must believe either that our existence will conclude with the present life—or that we shall continue to exist hereafter, but without any reference to our conduct while on earth—or else that our removal from this world will be followed by a state of retribution: these are the only alternatives; and unless we are content to live on in utter uncertainty as to the nature of what may ultimately prove our lot, one or other of them we necessarily must admit. If

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there is no future state, or if our existence in a future state does not depend on our conduct here, religion is a matter of little moment; for if all our prospects are confined to this life, prudence is the only guide of our actions, and it would become the exclusive pursuit of every reasonable man to secure himself the greatest possible amount of ease and comfort during this short and transitory existence. If a convert to natural religion should remain persuaded of a future state of retribution, still it is impossible that his new faith should lead him to a purer morality than is found in the Gospel; so that he gains nothing by abandoning the positive promises of Christianity for the uncertain suggestions of the religion which he has adopted in its place.

The votary of natural religion may entertain a wish, he may indulge a hope, but he can feel no confident expectation of a life after this; and we find that few of those who reject Christianity from reflection continue long to hold the belief of immortality. When the French revolutionists abandoned Christianity, they professed the utmost devotion for the religion of nature; and the first doctrine taught them by their new faith was, that death was an eternal sleep.

Natural religion is a wide and extensive field, in which every speculative opinion and every extravagant tenet has ample room to display itself,—in which every man is left to the deductions of his own reason or the suggestions of his own imagination,—in which neither his future hopes nor present obligations are established on any certain foundation,—where

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the morality of every action may be a matter of dispute, and even the moral accountability of mankind may be called in question. In that boundless ocean of uncertainty, I find but two undisputed principles,—the being of God, and the dependency of man. It is, indeed, nothing more nor less than the philosophy of the ancients; and what sort of religion that produced is a matter not of speculation, but of fact and experience.

It may be urged, that if a man finds, after a careful examination, that Christianity is inconsistent with reason, or not sufficiently supported by evidence, it will not be possible for him to admit its divine origin, and that in this case his only resource is natural religion; in other words, he is left to the suggestions of his own reason, which, however imperfect and uncertain, must be his only guide. There is undoubtedly a great deal of truth in the observation; and for this reason I consider that man to be the greatest benefactor of the human race, and the best advocate for Christianity, who endeavours to prove that it is not inconsistent with reason or repugnant to common sense,—by clearing it from the incumbrances with which it has been loaded, and almost overlaid, by ignorance, superstition, and enthusiasm, —by the interested or ambitious views of some of its votaries, and the blind zeal and credulity of their followers.

If the loose and imperfect hints I have here thrown out should be the means of inducing others, better qualified for the task than I can pretend to be, to exert their abilities in attempting to restore Christi-

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anity to its original reasonableness and simplicity, it would afford the best answer to infidels, and remove the chief obstacles in the way of the candid and ingenuous sceptic.

I am fully persuaded that more infidels have been made by the injudicious defenders of Christianity than by all the wit and argument of its enemies. The former have, in fact, supplied the latter with the most formidable weapons which have been directed against revelation; for I believe it will be found upon examination, that the most weighty objections are levelled rather against the corruptions and mistaken notions of Christianity than against Christianity itself. I have little hope, however, that such a work as I have suggested will be undertaken: divines are always more anxious to vindicate the religion of their church than the religion of Jesus; and if a man should step forward and engage in the cause of genuine Christianity without respect to the institutions or prejudices of any particular establishment, he would be opposed by most and supported by none.

If an impugner of Christianity were to come to us and say, Here is a religion which contains a more rational faith, which is founded on stronger evidence, which holds forth a purer morality, which ascertains on surer grounds a future state of immortality, and gives us better security for future happiness,—I should applaud his conduct; and, even if he were mistaken, the goodness of his motives would be a sufficient apology for the error of his judgment. But those have no claim to that indulgence, who, for

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the hopes of revelation, of which they attempt to deprive mankind, have nothing to substitute besides natural religion, which, in fact, is no religion at all, but leaves every man to the deductions of his own reason, the delusions of his fancy, and the wanderings of his imagination. It has long been tried and found wanting; it has proved an insufficient guide to the wisest of its votaries; and wherever it has prevailed, the bulk of mankind have been invariably sunk into the most degrading superstition.

I have no doubt that I shall incur the censure of the rigid sons of orthodoxy, who will tell me that my notions of Christianity are no better than deism, and that, when stripped of their beloved mysteries, the Christian religion loses all its use and efficacy, and is no better than a *caput mortuum*. But, if I do not form a false conclusion, the two great objects of Christianity are, to render men *better* in *this world*, and *happier* in the *next*. The first is the means by which the latter may be attained.

If the rational idea I have endeavoured to give of the religion taught by Jesus Christ, divested of all its enthusiastic doctrines and fanciful mysteries, be equally conducive to the attainment of these two ends, why should it be condemned, because it is plain, intelligible, and reconcileable to the common sense of mankind? On the contrary, I am firmly of opinion that those who place the merit of their faith in unintelligible doctrines, and in the belief of contradictions and absurdities, have furnished infidels with the most formidable weapons that were ever wielded against Christianity.

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APPENDIX.

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APPENDIX.

A.

ON MATTER AND SPIRIT.

THE more I consider the subject, the more fully I am convinced that all the disputes which have been supported with so much zeal and acrimony about matter and spirit are entirely verbal—at least have no influence on religion, however interesting they may be as a question merely philosophical. Every one must acknowledge that the sentient and intellectual principle, which moves, thinks, wills, and determines, is something different in its faculties and operations from a stone or a log of wood. The materialist ascribes this difference to a particular organization of matter; while the immaterialist attributes it to the intervention of what he calls a spiritual substance united to organized matter: but whatever may be its nature, the result is exactly the same, whether it proceeds immediately from organized matter, or from a spiritual substance acting through the bodily organs.

What has given importance to this dispute are the unauthorized inferences which both sides have drawn from their respective systems. The materialist concludes that the sentient principle, depending upon the organization of the material body, must necessarily cease when the matter of which that body is composed becomes dissolved by death; while the immaterialist contends, that what he calls the soul, being spiritual, must *necessarily* continue to exist after its separation from the body: but neither of these conclusions appears to me to be just.

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It is by no means a necessary conclusion, that, because the sentient and intellectual faculties of man depend on the organization of the brain, they must be finally extinguished by the dissolution of the body. This cannot seriously be maintained, at least by those who believe in the resurrection of the body itself, which, if it rises, will consequently rise again in all its organized perfection. Whether this intellectual faculty proceeds from what we call matter, or what is designated by the word spirit, appears to me to be of little consequence, when we consider that the same being who is supposed to create this spirit can modify matter in endless combinations which our limited understanding cannot discover. Indeed, the distinction between matter and spirit is a presumptuous decision in beings who are ignorant of the nature and properties of both; for of matter we know but little, of spirit nothing at all. We know indeed some properties of matter; but who is the man so bold as to presume that he has discovered all the properties of matter, or that he has found out all its possible combinations and modifications? Till such a discovery has been made, is it not presumptuous dogmatically to decide that it is necessary to introduce a new substance to account for faculties and properties which we have in our wisdom decided that the Almighty cannot communicate to matter, because we do not find it necessarily inherent in every mass which we designate by that name?

On the other hand, the immaterialist is still less warranted in his conclusion, that, because the soul is spiritual, (which is rather a negative than a positive expression, for it, in fact, means nothing but that it is not material, for what spiritual does positively mean cannot easily be explained,) I say, because the soul is spiritual or immaterial, which is the properest expression, it does not follow that it must be immortal, unless it is assumed that its spiritual nature renders it self-existent and independent of the Almighty; a conclusion which would be much more irreconcilable with Christianity,

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or any other rational religion, than any doctrine of the materialists. For man, body and soul, material or spiritual, is the creature of the Almighty; he exists by his permission, and ceases to be at his pleasure: we know that what we call his soul, whether spiritual or material, has had a beginning, and therefore may have an end; that it is not therefore in its nature immortal, but, like the body, depends on the Almighty will and pleasure for the continuance of its existence.

Where, then, is the difference between the two different systems? According to the materialist, the sentient and intellectual principle, usually called the soul, depends on the organization of material substance, liable to change and decay, but which God may continue to all eternity;—according to the immaterialist, it is a spiritual substance, not indeed in its nature liable to decay, but which is liable to be affected by the organs of the body, and which God may annihilate at his pleasure: and where is the practical difference as to any religious or moral purpose? If it is acknowledged—and few will be found bold enough to deny it—that God may prolong the existence of matter as long as he pleases, and that he may at his pleasure annihilate what we call spiritual substances, the result is precisely the same, and the nature of the soul becomes a mere question of philosophy, without any practical influence on our religious practice.

APPENDIX.

B.

ON THE GENUINENESS AND AUTHENTICITY OF THE SCRIPTURES.

It is no uncommon thing to contend that the Bible is as well attested as any other ancient book, and Homer is frequently cited as an instance. Between the Bible and Homer

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there can be no rational comparison. In any disquisition respecting ancient writings we must be cautious not to confound the genuineness and the authenticity of the work. For instance, if the Gospel of St. John was written by that Apostle, it is genuine; but it does not follow that it is authentic, because it might be written by him without being true. On the other hand, it might be authentic, that is, the whole of its contents might be true, though written by somebody else; but it would not be genuine. In the first case it would be genuine but not authentic, in the other it would be authentic but not genuine: but neither in point of genuineness or authenticity can it be compared with Homer. Homer is known to us only as the author of the Iliad and Odyssey: we are ignorant of the time and place of his birth, as well as of every circumstance of his life, except the tradition of his being blind, which certainly is not an article of faith: at least it is evident from his works that he was not always blind, though it is possible that he might have been so during some part of his life. In fact, Homer and the author of the Iliad and Odyssey are convertible terms. When we talk of him we consider him in no other light but as the author of these two poems; we annex no other idea to that name, which we use to avoid the periphrasis of the author of the Iliad and the Odyssey. If we should call him Hobin, it would by no means affect any of the observations made on that poet, who is only known or referred to as the real or supposed author of these poems. The genuineness of his works is, therefore, totally out of the question, since by Homer we only mean to designate the author of these two poems; because the name of the author, who is known only by these works, is a matter of mere indifference. In point of authenticity, or the truth of their contents, the comparison of the two books is still more irrelevant. The poems of Homer are mere works of imagination, and, whether founded on real or fictitious occurrences, were not certainly intended as articles of faith, nor to be received

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as undoubted and accurate facts; so that neither in point of genuineness or authenticity can there be any thing like a comparison between the poems of Homer and the Gospel. If compared with the ancients, the Gospel should be compared with Cicero, Cæsar, Tacitus, and other writers who were well known personages, and are the authors of historical facts, and of works admitted to be both genuine and authentic.

APPENDIX.

C.

ON THE RESURRECTION.

THE Author has to apologize to the Reader for the repetition that will be found, in the following pages, of several arguments which have already appeared in the preceding work. But as he thought the subject was such as deserved further discussion, he conceived he could not do justice to it without bringing forward again some of the observations which he had already submitted to the reader.

Whether we shall be transferred into another state of existence immediately at the time of our death, or whether we shall remain in a state of insensibility till the day of judgment after the consummation of all things, is a question which will not admit of an easy or certain solution, as many strong arguments may be and have been urged on both sides. It was, in all probability, in consequence of these conflicting opinions that an expedient was invented to reconcile both doctrines, by adopting that of an intermediate state, by which we are required to believe that the body remains in a quiescent insensible state till the resurrection, while the soul, which by its nature is immortal, continues in a separate state of ex-

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istence till the resurrection, when it shall again be united with its old associate, the body, which is then to be raised from the grave. Although this doctrine appears to me to be liable to stronger objections than either of the other two, it has prevailed almost universally, and has been adopted by almost every Christian community.

We are taught that during this life the soul is impeded in its energies by being united to such a dull heavy clog as our material body. We should, then, congratulate this airy spiritual being on its emancipation from its material prison; but, on the contrary, we are told that this immortal spiritual substance cannot arrive to perfect happiness till it is reunited to the same gross material body which was such a clog during their former joint existence.

I must acknowledge, at the same time, that there appears to me very strong objections to Bishop Law's system of the insensibility of mankind between death and the day of judgment. They must, indeed, be insuperable to the immaterialist; for though the body remains as quiet and inert as he could wish, he must find it difficult to account for the torpid state of the soul all this time; for as he conceives it to be in its nature spiritual and immortal, a state of insensibility for thousands of years cannot easily be reconciled to the energies of this spiritual and immortal substance, which obliged him to have recourse to an intermediate state.

But I should think the materialist would likewise be puzzled to account for this long cessation of existence, and the restoration of the individual body after so long a state of unconsciousness; and I think he will find sufficient employment to account for the reunion of the particles which formed the body of each individual, and which for thousands of years have been dispersed and undergone a thousand mutations and changes.

The improbability of so long a suspension of existence is increased by the consideration of the very great difference

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of duration between the short period of a man's life in this world and the long suspension of his being that must take place between his death and resurrection. We are told, indeed, that as a man will be totally insensible, that long interval will not be perceived, and that the moment of his dissolution and his restoration to life will appear contemporaneous. All this may be abstractedly true; but it does not come home to our feelings; and I believe I may appeal to any man upon his death-bed, whether he would not prefer an assurance of a moderate share of happiness immediately on his dissolution to a greater share of felicity ten thousand years hence. Suspension of existence for so long a time is little better than annihilation; and the restoration of his being after so long a period, is rather a new creation than a continuation of existence.

The greatest part of Law's arguments in favour of the insensibility of mankind till the resurrection may be easily reconciled to the continuance of his existence immediately after death. For admitting that he shall not be restored to a state of consciousness, as the Bishop contends, till the resurrection, we are unavoidably told to inquire what the resurrection or αναςασις signifies. It is nowhere asserted in Scripture that our *bodies* shall rise, but merely that man shall be restored to a state of existence which may take place immediately after death as well as at any other time; and it appears to me that the resurrection of the body could answer no possible end, and, if any thing were impossible to God, would amount to an impossibility. Suppose a man to die in a state of extenuation, with every member paralyzed, or with his limbs mutilated, is that man to rise again in that extenuated and mutilated state? When the endless combinations and changes which the particles which compose our body must unavoidably undergo are taken into consideration, it will not be easy to account how those particles which have suffered so many changes and modifications can be reunited.

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The omnipotence of God is here appealed to as an unanswerable argument, but perhaps even that omnipotence cannot solve the objection. It does not extend to contradictions; it cannot cause a thing to be and not to be, nor a body to be in two places at once. Now, if we suppose a man to be drowned, and devoured by a fish, of which he becomes a component part, which fish is afterwards eaten by another man, it will follow that the particles which formerly belonged to the drowned man, having been converted into the substance of the fish, ultimately became part of the substantial body of the man who fed upon it. These same particles having belonged at different times to different men, which is to claim them at the resurrection? Certain it is they cannot belong to both.

Without dwelling, however, on these difficulties, if this infirm, extenuated, and mutilated body must undergo a total transmutation, what is the use of raising this cadaverous body previously to such transmutation, after every particle of which it is composed must have undergone a thousand combinations and modifications? St. Paul tells us positively that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; that we shall be clothed with a spiritual and incorruptible body; and if so, what purpose would it answer to collect the various particles of the deceased body, dispersed through earth, air, and water, merely to change it into a spiritual body—to restore it, only to substitute another in its stead? If we are to have an incorruptible body, why be at the trouble of assembling all the particles of the corruptible and corrupted body which moulders in the grave?

It must however be admitted, that, if the fate of mankind is decided immediately after death, it is no easy matter to reconcile it with the account we have in Scripture of the day of judgment, if we take that account in a literal sense. But the same objection will remain in full force if we adopt the intermediate system. If the soul or sentient principle in

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man, whatever you may chuse to call it—whether spiritual or material is of little consequence, because both matter and spirit are equally plastic in the hands of the Almighty—I say, if this sentient principle, which is acknowledged to be the best part of our nature, receives its sentence immediately after death, and is consigned to a state of happiness, misery, or destruction, its fate is finally decided, and a future judgment dwindles into absolute insignificance, and is nothing more than mere parade.

We should consider that all descriptions of a future state are conveyed in language highly figurative, and which cannot admit of a literal interpretation; and that the description of the final judgment is only a scenic representation to strike our imaginations by an analogy with our most solemn trials. Surely, when we are told that the books will be opened, we are not to believe that the Almighty will register all our sins in a book; and if the book be only a metaphor, why may not the whole be a figurative but forcible representation of that awful trial and judgment which every man must undergo; not indeed all at the same time, but every one at the time of his death, and which may therefore very properly be called an universal judgment?

The phrase that the grave and the sea will give up their dead, and other similar expressions, are, like the opening of the books, mere figurative modes of speaking, to signify that all that are swallowed up in the deep or buried in the earth shall be restored to life, as the other, that they shall be brought to account for their actions as if they were registered in a book. Upon the whole, I think that the time, the nature, the circumstances of our future life are involved in impenetrable obscurity; and by giving a literal construction to figurative expressions, many errors have been entertained, and systems built on no better foundation than a figure or metaphor.

From St. Paul's expression, that it was better to be absent

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from the body, and present with the Lord, it might be argued that the body will not be admitted in the Lord's presence. I lay, however, no stress upon this argument, because the meaning evidently is, that it is better to be present with the Lord than to continue in this world; but it evidently appears from that mode of reasoning, that he expected to appear in the Lord's presence immediately on his leaving the body, or being removed from this world.

From the account we have of the Millennium, which has so much puzzled commentators, and on which they have thrown so little light, and especially from what St. Paul tells us of the reign of Christ, who after a certain time is to give up the administration to God, there is some reason to doubt whether the state of man there described shall be absolutely final and eternal. The words eternal, and for ever, and everlasting, are often used in Scripture with a greater degree of latitude than we usually annex to those words: as in Genesis xvii. 8, "I will give unto thee the land wherein thou art a stranger for an *everlasting* possession;" Numbers x. 8, "The sons of Adam shall blow with the trumpets, and they shall be to you an ordinance *for ever*." St. Jude, 7, "Even as Sodom and Gomorrah are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of *eternal* fire."

That the immediate decision of our fate, and the continuation of consciousness and the existence of the sentient principle after death, are liable to many objections, I am not disposed to deny. There is one in particular which it is not easy to answer; and that is, that if Jesus Christ has been the means of restoring mankind to immortality, if he is the first-fruit of them that slept, and those who died before his coming were restored to life at the time of their dissolution, the effect preceded the cause, and mankind were redeemed from the grave, and restored to immortality, before the Redeemer had done any thing to restore them.

It must likewise be acknowledged that our future state,

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and the sentence which is to be passed upon us, are always connected with the coming of Christ to judge the world, with the last day, when it is said the dead shall rise; and there is even a distinction made by St. Paul between those who shall be then living and those that shall rise from the dead.

There is one thing which has often occurred to me, and which I do not remember to have seen noticed by any one who has written on the subject, owing most probably to my want of memory, or my imperfect and partial researches; and that is, that we have accounts in the Gospel of Lazarus and others being raised from the dead: and if the soul or sentient principle continued in existence, and retained its consciousness, they must have known what state they were in between their dissolution and their resurrection. Lazarus had been dead some days; and those who rose out of their graves at the time of the crucifixion had probably been dead a longer time.

Upon the whole, the conclusion which I draw from the best consideration I have been able to bestow on the subject (others, perhaps, may see light where to me nothing but obscurity presents itself) is, that all we can learn from Scripture is, that there will be a state of retribution after this life, in which men will be rewarded or punished according to their works; but of the time, place, or even duration, of that state we must be content to remain in ignorance; the figurative expressions in which it is announced being rather meant to excite our attention than to gratify our curiosity. It may, perhaps, expose me to censure when I say that the duration of that state is a matter left in uncertainty, because the words eternal and for ever, as I have already observed and proved, are not always to be taken in their strict and literal acceptation, nor is it to be concluded as matter of faith that our situation in a future state will admit of no change, but will remain eternally the same.

But whatever doubts or difficulties may attend the subject, they are not removed but aggravated by the belief of an in-

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termediate state; which was, in all probability, devised to reconcile both opinions, but which elucidates nothing, answers no objection, but creates additional difficulties, and divides man into two substances, as the Godhead was divided into three persons, and the person of Christ into two natures.

Perhaps a great deal of the difficulties which perplex us respecting the time of the resurrection will vanish, if we admit the possibility that time and duration may be providential dispensations appropriated to our existence in this world, without any necessary connexion with the Supreme Being or our future state of existence. Such a possibility has often occurred to me, though, as it might appear visionary, I was cautious how I promulgated such a tenet, till I found it sanctioned by greater authority and wiser heads than my own, and particularly by the celebrated Dr. Channing. It certainly cannot be enforced as an article of faith, though it by no means appears to me void of probability: our dreams often embrace a much longer space of time than the few hours we indulge in sleep. It is true that we cannot conceive the idea of existence without that of time and duration; yet I will undertake to explain it in the clearest manner, when any one will teach me how to account for eternity, immensity, and self-existence, which, however incomprehensible to us, we are obliged to admit.

APPENDIX.

D.

ON FAITH.

MATT. xvi. 16: "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned."

This is one of the strongholds of those who magnify the merits of faith and depreciate the value of good works. A

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true Christian, they say, a regenerate man, need not trouble himself with the duties of morality; his faith is sufficient; and the divine grace, without any efforts of his own, will ensure his salvation. He is the elect of God, and therefore cannot sin. If they were to draw a rational inference from their own position, that a true believer is incapable of sin, they would conclude when they saw a man sin, notwithstanding his profession of faith, that he was not a true believer; and by making a man's moral conduct the criterion of his faith, they would practically come to a very rational conclusion in favour of morality. But they argue in a very different manner, and contend that those actions which would be sinful in others, become innocent, if not meritorious, when committed by the elect, whose sanctity spiritualizes all their actions. Such a doctrine is, in my opinion, the greatest subversion of all religion, and degrades Christianity even below the various superstitions which have at different times prevailed in the world; and it is to be hoped that few adopt tenets so destructive of all virtue and morality—at least to their full extent.

But even those who do not entirely rely upon faith, to the exclusion of all virtue and morality, are often apt to ascribe more merit to the mere act of believing than reason or Scripture, well understood, will warrant; and perhaps this text has been chiefly instrumental in creating and encouraging such an opinion. In other places, where faith is extolled in opposition to works, the word *faith* may rationally and even critically be explained so as to signify something more than mere assent or belief. In some places it is used as synonymous with the Christian dispensation, in opposition to the ceremonial law established by Moses. In other places it may be understood as including fidelity, and all the virtues which may be expected to be the fruits of a sincere faith, in the same manner as the fear of God is often used for religion in general. But in this text there is no room for any such interpretation: it refers to mere belief and the ceremony of

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baptism; and all that can be inferred is, that such a belief is supposed to be intended as will be followed by the effects which may be expected to proceed from a firm persuasion, and that such effects are implied in the observation, though not expressed. I would by no means reject this explanation, which is in substance adopted by Clarke and Priestley, and several others, if no better could be found; but it appears to me that this text may be interpreted in a manner at once more plain, obvious, and satisfactory.

I own it may be considered as great presumption in a person like myself, who has not made it his particular object to study the Sacred Writings, to propose a new elucidation of a passage which has escaped the penetration of so many able and learned commentators, who have spent their lives and dedicated their abilities to the examination and interpretation of this and other difficult passages in the New Testament; and I am almost tempted to suspect, either that there is less weight in the following observations than I imagine, or that the same explanation has been proposed by others, though from my circumscribed reading and imperfect knowledge of the subject it has never fallen in my way. It is possible that the same considerations which to me appear weighty and convincing, may be considered by others as trifling and inconclusive, and that arguments which come to me with the appearance of novelty may be familiar to others. Such as they are, however, I will submit them to the reader with all the diffidence which becomes the subject and the writer.

I will therefore at once acknowledge, that to me it appears that the very import of this passage has been totally mistaken, and *that there is no reference in it to our future state.* This may, at first sight, be considered as a bold assertion; but those who will condescend to examine the subject coolly and dispassionately, and forget their preconceived notions, will, I flatter myself, be disposed to acknowledge that my opinion is not so rash and unfounded as it may appear at first sight.

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Many of the most absurd doctrines which prevail in the Christian world are founded on a misunderstanding of some of the most common expressions in Scripture, which have obtained a meaning quite different from that which the writers intended to convey. The word *hell*, for instance, which occurs so frequently, does not always mean, as it is generally understood, a place of torment: it means sometimes the state of the dead in general, sometimes the grave, and sometimes a deep pit. The translators of the Old Testament, by using the word *Redeemer*, have led commentators to apply many texts to Christ which would not have admitted of such an application if the proper word, *Deliverer*, had been adopted by them instead of Redeemer.

The same remark applies to the two words, *salvation* and *damnation*. Salvation is always understood, in modern phraseology, to refer to our eternal state in another world, whereas it frequently alludes in Scripture to the state of those who were converted to Christianity, and were by that means supposed to be saved from the danger to which those who remained in an unconverted state were exposed. And it is in this sense I understand the word *saved* in our present text, of which I conceive the meaning to be, "Those that believe your doctrine, and are baptized, shall be received into your communion, and admitted among those that are saved or converted."

In the interpretation of doubtful expressions it is necessary to attend to the context, to consider the occasion and the design of the speaker, and not take them abstractedly and without reference to what precedes or follows. It is evident that Christ was not here alluding to a future state of rewards and punishments, but was giving directions to the Apostles with respect to their ministry in this world. The whole of his instructions is contained in the four following verses:—

15. "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.

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16. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

17. "And these signs shall follow them that believe: In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;

18. "They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."

In the 15th verse he tells them what was the object of their mission,—to preach the Gospel everywhere. In the 16th he directs them how they were to conduct themselves, by receiving into their communion those that believed and received baptism, and by rejecting those who did not believe. In the following verses he mentions the distinguishing marks of those who should be saved in consequence of their belief, not that they should be happy to all eternity, which would have been the case if their eternal salvation had been meant; but the believers were to cast out devils, to heal the sick, and speak unknown tongues, &c.; all which had reference to the privileges they were to enjoy in this world, but without the most distant reference to their happiness in the next.

It would, indeed, be a strange anti-climax, if, after saying, in the 16th verse, that believers should enjoy eternal happiness, he should dwell, in the following verses, on the various privileges they should enjoy in this world; whereas, if we take the word *saved* in the sense which, I think, belongs to it here, and in which, as I shall prove, it is used in many other places, the whole will be consistent, and one part follow the other in the most natural manner possible. "Go and preach the Gospel to all men; those that believe you and are baptized shall be received among the converts, and believers shall be distinguished by many spiritual gifts."

I will now proceed to shew that the word is used in the sense I annex to it in several other places in Scripture; but there is one text in particular that deserves a more than usual

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share of attention—I mean Ephes. ii, 8: For by grace are ye *saved*, through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."

It is evident that the salvation here mentioned is not a future salvation, but a salvation which they then enjoyed. These words are addressed to the whole church of Ephesus, who were all saved, that is, converted to Christianity, admitted members of the Christian church; but surely St. Paul could not mean to say that they would all ultimately be saved, much less that they were so already. The meaning is, "you are now placed in a state of salvation through faith in the Gospel, not from any merit of your own, but because it pleased God to have it preached unto you." And it is no small satisfaction to me that I do not stand alone in my interpretation of this text, but am supported by the authority of Bishop Pearce, who understands it in the same sense, and from whom I shall quote the following extract:—

"The holy penmen of the New Testament constantly describe Christianity as a state of salvation; they speak of those who were baptized into it, upon their repentance and their faith in Christ Jesus, as of persons then actually saved by baptism from eternal misery, because they then entered into such a covenant with God as entitled them to this benefit. This, I say, is their constant language—the language of St. Paul especially: for instance, speaking of the state of Christians, he describes them as persons not to be saved in the next world, but as persons then already saved, on account of their having embraced Christianity. His words are, 2 Tim. i. 9, 'God hath saved us, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus.' The same way of speaking is repeated by him in the same account, where, when his discourse was concerning God, he says, 'according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost,' Tit. iii. 5; agreeably to which, what we read in Acts ii. 47,

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'The Lord added daily such as should be saved,' ought to have been rendered, 'such as were saved.' And so in my text we read, 'by grace are ye saved,' εστε σεσωσμένοι—'ye are persons who have been saved,' as the original words properly signify. You see thus that in these passages the salvation of Christians is spoken of as of a thing then already past and done, not as we commonly understand salvation, for a happy event to take place in a future state of recompense (and afterwards). By becoming Christians, they were, immediately upon their repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus, saved from eternal misery. The new state they were put into promised them this, and secured it to them, if they on their parts did not afterwards forget this great benefit."

Thus far the Bishop; and now, if the word *saved* will admit of this interpretation in this passage of St. Paul's to the Ephesians, as well as in the other texts cited by the Bishop, why should it not admit of the same sense in the passage which is the subject of these remarks? The expression is used and applied by Jesus Christ in our text, and by St. Paul, exactly to the same persons. Jesus says, that those who believe and are baptized shall be saved; and St. Paul says to those who believed and were baptized that they were saved. Upon every principle of criticism, the same salvation which is signified in the one case must be meant in the other: the occasion, nay, the very individuals are the same;—the one referring to an event which was to take place, the other to the same event after it was accomplished.

I shall, however, to shew that this is no unusual meaning of the word *saved*, add a few other instances, from many more, in confirmation of my interpretation.

In Rom. xi. ver. 25, 26, St. Paul says, "I would not, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come

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in." "And so all Israel shall be *saved;* as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob."

Here the salvation of Israel can only be understood of the conversion of the Jews to Christianity—not of their eternal salvation.

In the first Epistle to the Corinthians, ch. i. 18, St. Paul says, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness; but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God."

It is plain that by *saved* must be understood being converted to Christianity; and therefore in a state of salvation: none could yet be said to be saved, in the common sense of the words, whatever they might be hereafter; and, indeed, their final salvation was so far from being, with the Apostle, a matter of certainty, that in one place he is under some apprehension that, after having preached to others, he might himself be a castaway.

It is unnecessary to accumulate texts to prove that a conversion to Christianity is, in Scripture language, called salvation, and that those who embraced it were said to be saved. It only remains, therefore, to explain the latter part of the text, which says that he that "believeth not shall be damned." Now damned is clearly opposed to saved; and therefore if *saved* means that those that are saved shall be admitted into the Christian communion, it is plain that those that are to be damned are to be punished by not being received, but are to be rejected and excluded from it. The meaning is much the same as on a former occasion, when Jesus sent his disciples to preach the Gospel to the Jews, Matt. x. 14: "And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet."

Indeed, the meaning of the word *save* is so very far from

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being confined, even in English, to our eternal salvation, that its more general signification is to preserve from any danger or calamity, and in this sense it is frequently used in Scripture. When Jesus had healed a sick person, he says to him, "Thy faith hath saved thee,"—not that his faith had secured his eternal salvation, but that it had saved him from the calamity he suffered from his sickness. And, perhaps, the same expression in the text would not have been so strictly applied to a future state, if it had not been for the latter part of the sentence, in which those that are *damned* are opposed to those that are *saved.* But though the word *damned* seems to have a more positive meaning, yet this is merely owing to our translation, for the word in the original has not that exclusive signification which we give to the words *damn* and *damnation.* This exclusive meaning is confined to modern languages by which we are often led to discover many things in our translation which are not in the original. The Greek word in the original, as well as the Latin, whence the words *damn* and *damnation* are immediately derived, signifies only condemnation, without any distinction of its nature and extent: the man who is convicted of stealing an apple is as much condemned, or, according to our idiom, damned, as he who is found guilty of the greatest crime. By annexing this exclusive meaning to the word, we are led to convert every sort of censure or condemnation mentioned in Scripture into a sentence of eternal damnation. As an instance of this, I will only quote 1 Cor. xi. 29: "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself." This text has been the cause of much uneasiness to many sincere Christians, from the mistaken sense in which they understood the word *damnation,* which is now allowed by all rational and candid commentators to signify merely condemnation or punishment, but to have no reference whatever to a future state.

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If the words in the text are taken in the sense which I understand them to convey, they will be appropriate to the occasion when they were used, and at the same time will give us a plain, rational meaning, which will admit neither of cavil nor difficulty. Our Saviour here gives his Apostles a commission to preach the Gospel to all men; then he directs them how they are to conduct themselves towards believers and unbelievers; and then he tells them the powers and privileges which believers shall receive, not in the next world, but immediately on their conversion, or, as it is expressed, on being saved. Here the connexion is preserved, which certainly would not not be the case if by being saved we should understand their everlasting salvation to be intended.

In this sense the text is free from the objections which have been urged against it in its usual acceptation; for we cannot easily be persuaded that all that believe and are baptized shall be saved—that is, finally saved—any more than we can suppose that all that believe not shall be damned. The words indeed, as generally understood, and taken in their literal acceptation, would tend to establish not only the absolute necessity, but likewise the sufficiency, of faith alone to our eternal salvation.

I am well aware that many strong and indeed incontrovertible arguments have been adduced against understanding these words literally, as if mere belief without a corresponding practice were sufficient to secure our salvation; but these arguments are chiefly founded on the absurdity of such a literal interpretation, and its manifest contradiction to many plain and express texts of Scripture which contain a doctrine in direct opposition to such enthusiastic notions of the exclusive sufficiency of faith alone, independent of good works. The interpretation I have ventured to suggest entirely removes all possibility of wresting the text to answer the

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purposes of fanaticism; it makes it consistent with other parts of Scripture, and at the same time it renders the instructions and directions of Jesus to his Apostles more connected and consistent than the usual mode of interpretation. The sole object of his discourses seems to be, to order the Gospel to be preached to all men, to direct them how to conduct themselves in their ministry towards believers and unbelievers, and the gifts which the believers should receive for the more successful propagation of the Gospel—but not a word as to the future condition of its professors. It may, perhaps, be some confirmation of the view I have taken of this text, that, in the parallel places in the other Evangelists which relate this commission of Christ to his disciples, the whole account is confined to the temporal transactions and consequences of their ministry, without any reference to the future state of believers or unbelievers.

Before I conclude, it may not be improper to add a few passages in which the word *damnation* signifies only blame, condemnation, and censure, and has no reference whatever to future punishments.

In Rom. iii. 8, "And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil that good may come? whose damnation is just." Upon which words we have the following very just comment in Hewlett's Bible: "Rather, the censure or condemnation of whom is well founded or deserved." And I believe no man understands the words in any other sense.

In the chap. xiii. of the same epistle, verse 2, "Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation."

There may, perhaps, be some difference of opinion in what sense the word *damnation* is to be taken in this place, though the most obvious meaning, and that adopted by the best

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commentators, and confirmed by the context, refers to the temporal punishment inflicted by the civil power; and we have this note in Hewlett's Bible: "the original word is κριμα, meaning here the sentence of a court of judicature."

And in verse 23d of the xivth chapter, "And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith; for whatsoever is not of faith is sin." It will scarcely be contended that St. Paul here should intend to say, that eating was a damning sin, but merely that, in cases of doubt, it was wrong to eat; and so, indeed, it is explained by the commentator in Hewlett's Bible: "Is condemned; in other words, he bringeth on himself the sentence of self-condemnation."

Indeed, to those who have carefully and critically examined the subject, I believe it will appear that the real difficulty is not to find texts of Scripture where the word *damnation* is to be understood as signifying blame, censure, or condemnation, without any reference to future punishments,—that being the way in which it is generally, if not universally, used,—but that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to find any place in which it is used in any other sense, or where it is intended to express what we mean by the popular acceptation of the word *damnation*. The text on which I have been commenting is, as far as I recollect, the only instance in which such a meaning can be applied to it. 2 Thess. ii. 12, may, perhaps, admit of that interpertation, but it is better explained in the larger sense, *condemnation*, viz., "That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness:" but why should the word there be taken in a sense different from that in which it is used in so many other places in Scripture, when it is known and acknowledged that the original word in the Greek and the Latin, from which we derive the modern word *damnation*, have not the exclusive meaning which we annex to that word

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but may be understood to mean condemnation, blame, or censure, as well in this as in the other texts in which it is universally taken in that sense?

Neither the Greeks nor Romans used the word which we translate *damnation* in the exclusive sense we understand it; nor does it appear that either Jesus Christ or his Apostles used it in that sense in any other place, either in the Gospel or Epistles. If so, why should it be understood in this place in a sense different from that in which it is used in all other instances? especially as, by taking it to have the same meaning which it has on other occasions, it agrees better with the context, and gives no room for the monstrous doctrines relating to faith which have been built upon it—doctrines as repugnant to reason as they are irreconcilable with the real doctrines of revelation, and subversive of all morality.

It appears to me rather extraordinary that such able commentators as Clarke, Priestley, and Lardner, men who thought for themselves and were so well versed in the Scriptures, should have understood this text in the usual sense; for so evidently did Priestley, in his Notes on the Bible, and Clarke, in his two Sermons on that text, understand it; and Lardner gives no interpretation of the text: the only observation he makes on the subject is, that the latter part of the 16th chapter of St. Mark, of which this passage makes a part, is omitted in some of the ancient copies. When I began the above comment, I had never met with any author who understood the words in what I consider to be their proper meaning; but I have since found that Taylor, in his Seventh Letter of Ben Mordecai, has given the same interpretation as that which appears to me to be the true one. If the 16th verse, taken by itself, and separate from the context, could be in the least doubtful, yet surely its meaning is sufficiently ascertained by that which immediately follows;

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for we are told that those who shall have been saved in consequence of their belief and baptism, shall—not enjoy everlasting happiness in the presence of God and his angels, the usual description of eternal felicity—but that they shall cast out devils, and speak with new tongues, here on this earth, and which could not therefore possibly be the result of their eternal salvation.

Upon the whole it, appears clearly that this passage contains three particular objects. The first, an injunction to preach the Gospel to every creature. The second, how the Apostles were to conduct themselves towards believers and unbelievers. The third, what would be the blessings by which believers were to be distinguished. With respect to the first, there seems to be no dispute: the only observation I shall make upon it is, that "every creature" is not to be understood so strictly as if the Apostles were to preach the Gospel to every individual, or, indeed, to every people; the principal meaning is, that they were not to confine their preaching to the Jews, but to extend it to the Gentiles. The second article ordains, that those who shall believe, and, as a proof of their belief, receive baptism, shall be considered in a state of salvation, which we have seen is often the meaning of the word *saved,* and received into the church or communion of Christians; and unbelievers were to be condemned or rejected. That this is the meaning is evident from the third particular, which describes the privileges which those who are saved in consequence of their belief are to enjoy: and these are,—not immortal felicity in a future state, which would certainly have been stated as the consequence if allusion was made to their eternal salvation,—but merely that they shall cast out devils and speak with new tongues, which undoubtedly refer to their temporal state, and not to their final salvation.

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I have been informed that Whitby understands this text in the same sense as I have endeavoured to explain it. It would be a great satisfaction to have my opinion sanctioned by so great an authority; but as I have never had an opportunity of reading any of his works, I cannot be certain that he takes exactly the same view of it as I have done. Taylor, however, an acute reasoner, in his Ben Mordecai, interprets this passage much in the same manner as I have done.

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ERRATA.

Page 77, note, Pearce's Sermons, *for* Vol. IV. *read* Vol. I.
for Ib. p. 91, *read* Vol. IV. p. 91.
187, line 12, "and to induce" *dele* "to."
239, line 13, *for* give *read* have.
243, line 14, *for* natural faith *read* natural religion.

Note.—The contents of Appendix B were intended to be inserted in the body of the work, p. 165, to which they properly belong, but were omitted by mistake.

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