

AN  
EXAMINATION  
OF THE  
PRINCIPLES  
CONTAINED IN THE  
AGE OF REASON.  
IN TEN DISCOURSES.

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TO THE MEMBERS OF THE PRESBYTE-  
RIAN CHURCH, RESIDING AT ALEX-  
ANDRIA.

*My dear Friends and Brethren,*

**D**ISCOURSES, immediately for your use, naturally claim your protection. Any publication in the form of Sermons may be laid aside by many without examination. With the name something forbidding is connected. My sentiments on this interesting subject might have been conveyed under another form. This is the most familiar. It also admits great variety. Sober minds do not reject a dress which is decent, and fit for the season, because it is not altogether fashionable.

The propriety of discussing a subject which has already been fully repeated, and in the most masterly manner discussed may be doubted. The season seemed to require it. If infidelity triumph, the triumph must be stopped. I offer nothing entirely new: neither do I offer a compilation. I have examined the subject carefully. You have my own reflections on it nor have I refused the reflections of others. Assistance from any quarter was cheerfully received.

“The Age of Reason” discovers great ignorance of the subject which it pretends to illustrate, and an utter contempt for revelation, and for all its advocates. It would be very easy to take the book,

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page by page, and to establish fully all these charges. A disputatious spirit had led to such a tract. For disputation I have no taste; my only wish is to promote the truth. To oppose scorn to scorn, appears to me very improper on so serious a subject. I lay down certain principles, and shew how these may be applied. Either this vain book is full of groundless assertions and blasphemous boasting, or the principles which I have attempted to establish are entirely false. I can, for my own part, as soon doubt my own existence as these principles. I am not singular in this; many to whom I address myself have the same conviction, and few can bring themselves to believe that, that conviction is illusive. If the faith of the one be confirmed, and the doubts of the other removed, I shall not think my labour has been lost.

Inelegancies might have been avoided by omitting observations suggested by the state of my immediate charge, and the occurrences of the moment; but as my aim is usefulness rather than elegance, I have ventured the following discourses abroad in their native dress, without any attempt to modernize them.

I offer them to my pastoral charge as an evidence of my concern for their welfare.

Should some copies of these discourses find their way among these, in the island of Bermuda, for whom I once laboured, let my old friends know the tender desire which I still entertain for their welfare, and the satisfaction which I should feel in being still able to promote that in any way.

*I think myself entitled to the prayers of my people, that this work, thro' the divine blessing, may be accepted by the public, and useful to the christian cause.*

*Christianity proceeding from God must stand. No weapon formed for its destruction shall prosper. Boldly therefore I leave my own charge, and the christian church in general, on the guardian care and the enriching blessing of our Divine Redeemer.*

*Your servant,*

*In the gospel of Jesus Christ*

**JAMES MUIR.**

*Alexandria, November 24th, 1794.*

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# DISCOURSE I.

THE SUBJECT INTRODUCED.

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PROVERBS i. 20, 21, 22, 23.

*Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets. She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scornors delight in their scorning? and fools hate knowledge? Turn ye at my reproof; behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you I will make known my words unto you.*

**S**OLOMON expostulates in these words with irreligious persons on their conduct. Their conduct is spoken of as *simple, scornful and foolish*: It is opposed to the dictates of wisdom delivered in the most articulate, the most public, the most commanding manner. It has nothing to recommend it, no reason therefore can justify persisting therein: renouncing it, has immediate and great advantages. I shall, thro' divine as-

sistance, attempt the illustration of each of these particulars.

Expostulating with the irreligious on their conduct, Solomon speaks of it—1st. As *simple, scornful* and *foolish*.

The conduct of irreligious persons is declared to be *simple*. “Ye simple ones.” Sadly they impose upon themselves. Others fear God, and are directed and restrained by his law: They cast off this fear, and will submit neither to its direction nor restraint. Let vulgar minds act under such influence. They are more discerning. Their own reason is a sufficient guide. The world has hitherto been misled, discovering the error; they are for the future to think and act for themselves. No doubt these are the people, and wisdom shall die with them. They *deny* what others firmly *believe*; deride what others venerate; throw off the yoke which others know has been imposed by the Creator. In this there is a boldness of a singular kind. It is the boldness of the child who handles unwarily the keen-edged-instrument, who seizes, undaunted the envenomed viper; or who walks heedless on the dangerous precipice. That religion has been mistaken, and abused, is not to be denied. Impute not this to religion, but to human weakness and degeneracy: use it as an inducement to be more diligent in investigating the subject; but let it not drop neglected and contemned. There is

in the heart, such enmity to God, that men avail themselves of whatever appears able to justify them in casting off his fear and service. Such conduct is spoken of in my text as very contemptible. Men act not in so simple a manner in the affairs of this world; they weigh worldly matters well, and decide prudently; but in religion a superficial attention only is given, and conclusions of a most erroneous kind are drawn. Scornful is the conduct of the irreligious, as well as the *simple*. There is a gradual progress in a sinful course. Men proceed not at once to extremes. From walking in the counsel of the ungodly, from standing in the way of sinners, they venture to sit in the chair of the scornful. Religion is turned into ridicule. It is attacked by scoffs and jeers; at hours the most unguarded it is called for, as Sampson was, to encrease men's mirth; making a mock at sin, as nothing new. Sinners have often treated God's threatenings and judgments with contempt. Look back O scorers, to him who introduced this practice, and boast of it, if you think well; the Devil heads the wretched band, he first turned God's word into ridicule. Darkning very plain words, by arguments of a more subtle kind, he effectually deceived our first parents, and betrayed them into a conduct the most fatal to themselves, and to their descendants. To this source the sophistry in succeeding ages, which has proved so prejudicial to religion, may be traced. The most degenerate natures are the most given to use this vile artifice, in order to discredit, and, if possible,



to undermine religion. The narrations, the doctrines, the characters, found in scripture, are viewed with a jaundiced eye; and falshood being substituted for truth, ignorance for knowledge, a superficial glance for an accurate examination, what is most sacred, most venerable, and most useful is exposed in a fool's coat, to the derision of the inconsiderate; I cannot conceive what satisfaction can be derived from such a practice; yet, alas! it is too common, and its baneful influence severely felt.

Foolish is the conduct of irreligious persons, as well as *simple* and scornful. The fool hates knowledge. The ear of the wise is open to instruction. Its voice, from any quarter is attended unto. Confirmed, indeed, must he be in wickedness, who will not listen to the dictates of wisdom. To this men proceed by the steps already pointed out. It is the summit of degeneracy. There is hope as long as men are teachable. Hating knowledge; the symptoms are of the very worst kind. Rich were the Laodiceans in their own conceit, in a religious view, and increased with goods, and having need of nothing: whilst Infinite Wisdom knew them to be "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Rich is the infidel, if we take his word for it, and increased with goods, and having need of nothing. He is settled in his opinion, and believes the foundation on which he rests firm as the everlasting hills; but God knows that he is wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. He is sporting on a precipice.

He is the prisoner of justice. The sentence is incurred; it shall pass, it shall be executed to his surprise, and ruin. Such act under a judicial blindness: Nothing can be more infatuated. Persuade the madman, fettered down in his cell, of his situation—it cannot be done: he believes himself a prince, invested with the insignia of royalty; having at his command all the pleasures of a court: such the infidel. He is sunk into a fatal security, from which he cannot be roused.

As the conduct of irreligious persons is represented by Solomon, in his expostulations with them, as *simple, scornful, and foolish*, it is also represented,

II. As opposed to the dictates of wisdom, delivered in the most articulate, the most public, the most commanding manner: *Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets; she crieth in the chief place of concourse; in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words.*

Wisdom here is expressive of these prudent counsels which men repeatedly have from conscience, from providence, and from scripture: Their language is distinct and faithful. It is heard amidst the noise of business, and the croud of company; it sounds in our ears, in the streets, or at the gate, at home, or abroad. The cry of wisdom cannot be suppressed. Folly seeks the shade and lurks in darkness; it whispers in the

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ear its impiety, and communicates, secretly, its poison to the heart. Wisdom is open and importunate; no noise can drown its voice, no business, private or public, restrain its reproof. Let the sinner fly, it follows him: let him step to the right hand, or to the left, the voice behind him cannot be silenced. It proclaims distinctly, *This is the way, walk ye in it.* It teaches and reproveth; it gives correction and instruction in righteousness. Alarming was it to Adam, when he had disobeyed God. It disturbed him in his unsafe retreat, and brought him to judgment. Judas could not bear its terrors: It made Felix tremble on the bench: It filled Bellshazzar and his nobles with consternation, when rioting at an impious festival; and rendered even Herod pensive and uneasy, in the exercise of arbitrary and unjust authority. When a secret intimation awakes a dread that the unbeliever may be wrong, or the unholy be subjected to punishment; when overwhelmed with distress, they are unhappy, having no anchor by which they may weather out the storm, no hope to buoy them up. When the word of truth pierces their hearts, and leaves this impression, that being out of the way, they are greatly exposed. In either, in all of these cases, we have a specimen of the exertions of wisdom to draw mankind from error, and thereby to prevent their ruin.

The conduct of irreligious persons being simple, scornful, and foolish;—being opposed to the dictates of wisdom, delivered in the most articu-

late, public and commanding manner, having nothing to recommend it. There is,

III. No reason which can justify the persisting therein. "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning? and fools hate knowledge?" By interrogations we may assert in the strongest manner. They leave the matter on the conscience. The answer is implied, and being supposed to come from the guilty person, is the more conclusive. The language of my text is thus forcible. It represents the unaccountable folly and stupidity of sinners, of which a moment's reflection must convince them. Is it not abundantly verified that such men deceive themselves?—And will you continue the cheat? Have you not acted long enough against reason and conscience?—Why play the fool any longer? What pleasure is there in scoffing at religion? What wisdom in turning from a prudent monitor? What praise in continuing in ignorance?

Deceitful as the heart is, and desperately wicked, few, I believe, are able altogether, to throw off religion. Even those who have it in derision, have it so, because it makes them uneasy, repro-  
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 bating their wicked practices; seek relief in making as light of it as possible, as the afflicted sometimes seek relief in intoxication. Thought may hereby be absorbed for the moment, but it recurs

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 with more severity. Such the relief which infidels experience in their unwarrantable practices. They impose silence upon conscience, but it will speak, and thunder terrors into their ears. Religion is adapted to make us happy; and is congenial to the soul; rejecting it, men determine that it shall be the subject of their thoughts, and the rule of their lives at some future period. The young will think of it when they are old; the busy, when it may be convenient; the robust, when reduced by sickness: no determination can be more unwise. To act upon it is to act in a manner highly infatuated. Let us reason the same way in other cases. I am sick, but refuse medicine, or advice; I shall persist in the course which aggravates the disease, and roots it in my constitution: here the disease becomes desperate, and I must die; I shall hasten to the physician and exhaust the drugs in the apothecary's shop. I have stepped aside from the way; I will not yet turn back, but go on, and still go on, entering one winding after another, until there be no hope of recovering the path which I had left. My house is in flames—I will not stir—the flames rise more forcibly, and spread around, I am still immovable, The possibility of escape is at last excluded; now I will arise—I will fly—I will escape—but I cannot; the flames are on all sides. I am undone; could any conduct be more infatuated? Yes, it is more infatuated to put off the thoughts of religion. "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love

simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning? and fools hate knowledge?"

You are to lay it to heart at some future period. This was the determination of Felix. It was not then convenient for him to repent, and to reform; and the convenient season never arrived. Speak of a future moment to become religious; you speak against your own souls. The scripture says "*To day*, if you will hear his voice; behold *now* is the accepted time, behold *now* is the day of salvation. Remember *now* thy Creator in the days of thy youth; seek the Lord while he *may be found*." Do you know, certainly, that you shall be alive to-morrow? Has not death seized many as young, as healthy, as promising as any hearing me? Has not the grave opened to receive them? Are you more secure than they were? Why boast of life? It is a vapour. If any thing be done, it must be done now, or the opportunity of doing it may never occur. Delay not. "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning? and fools hate knowledge?" Let your hearts this moment rise to God; retire to your closets, anxiously enquiring, "Lord what wouldst thou have me to do? What shall I do to be saved?"

The uncertainty of life is not the only danger attending delay. In a penitent, believing, and holy conduct, is all your hope. If this be necessa-

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 ry to-day, it will also to-morrow, or at any future period; God will not alter his demand, but complying, will, by delay, become more difficult. There is a progress in sin. Habits are found to be inveterate. Can the Ethiöpean change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may they do good who have been accustomed to do evil. As God will always insist on repentance, faith, and new obedience in order to salvation; and as the continuance in an evil course occasions a growing incapacity for these exercises, and even distaste, nothing can exceed the madness of venturing our eternal welfare on such a hazard. "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scornors delight in their scornings? and fools hate knowledge?"

Let not men deceive themselves; God will not be mocked. If they forget him, if they disobey him, he may command, "Cut down these cumberers of the ground. They set at nought all my counsel, they would none of my reproof. I also will laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear cometh. Let them fall into desolation, let them be consumed with terrors, let their names be written in the dust, and their image bedespised." Could any command my brethren, be more terrible? Yes, it would be still more terrible, were the command, "Let these continue on earth, let them enjoy a faithful ministry, let them have line upon line, and precept upon

“precept, let them have every degree of worldly  
 “prosperity, let them proceed in profaning my  
 “name, abusing my ordinances, deriding my  
 “word; let them be proof against the voice of  
 “conscience, and providence, let them resist my  
 “spirit, and harden themselves in wickedness.  
 “That at a future day, ripe for destruction, they  
 “may fall, drawing down ten-fold vengeance on  
 “their devoted heads.” What an intolerable si-  
 tuation! Yet, perhaps, it is not singular; those  
 who abuse great advantages, are punished; being  
 left to themselves, to believe a lie, and to grow  
 worse and worse, that, in their fall, providence  
 may warn others, and rouse them to considerate  
 and religious lives.

Renouncing an irreligious life, has

IV. Immediate, and great advantages. “Turn  
 ye at my reproof; behold, I will pour out my  
 spirit unto you, I will make known my words  
 unto you.” No doctrine more convincingly esta-  
 blished, both from scripture and experience, than  
 the utter inability of man to will, or to do of  
 God’s good pleasure; at the same time it must be  
 evident that none who use their natural powers  
 to the utmost in returning to God, have ever yet  
 been, or, for the future, ever shall be, disappoint-  
 ed. On this principle proceeds the exhortations  
 addressed in scripture to those who are wicked;  
 and the judgments denounced when they hold



out against these exhortations. Of all characters, Simon Majus appears to be the most abandoned. Yet even he was commanded, "repent, and pray God, if, perhaps, the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee." Steps for this purpose are required of every sinner, which, when taken, are attended with an influence every way efficacious. If at any time the heart of sinners relent; if now some relentness be experienced, cherish the opportunity, it is highly favourable: or should a sad hardness and unrelenting disposition be descriptive of your present state, reflect on the unreasonableness of this, of its present and future danger. Break off open vice, forsake that company, lay aside those books, which confirm you in infidelity; look up for mercy, persist, knowing that life and death are suspended on the issue. You are assured of success on the word of him who cannot lie. Light shall break in upon your mind; you shall feel new vigor; what before was doubtful, shall be plain. Difficulties in your way, like impassable mountains, shall be removed; you shall run in the ways of God's commandments. Men at last shall undoubtedly be condemned, if destitute of faith, of repentance, and of new obedience. There is as little doubt of our obtaining faith, repentance, and new obedience, if we take such steps to obtain these as God requires us to take. "If you perish, O sinner, your blood shall be on your own head; for you may now return to God, and he will pour out his spirit upon you, and make known his words unto you."

## DISCOURSE II.

THE NATURE OF INSPIRATION STATED.

2 TIMOTHY, iii. 16.

*All scripture is given by inspiration of God.* X 2

**O**F the old Testament the Apostle here speaks, for the new, when Timothy was a child, did not yet exist. That volume was in high veneration among the Jews. They inculcated upon their children the same veneration. From the first dawn of reason they made them acquainted with the scripture. Had the example been universally followed, many roots of bitterness, which sprang up to the ruin of the church, had long before now been extirpated. The example is praise-worthy. Better for our children that they be ignorant of every thing beside, than ignorant of the scripture. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God." X

Discouring from these words, the *possibility* of such inspiration, the *necessity*, and the na-

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ture, shall, through divine assistance be illustrated. I am

I. To illustrate the *possibility* of such inspiration.

The mind is a spiritual substance, perfectly distinct from what is gross and material. Its capacity is great. It is a flame of fire; nothing so active nor penetrating. Kindled in Heaven, it cannot be extinguished. In this consists our superiority over the beast of the field, and the fowls of Heaven; on this was impressed, the image of God, in which we were originally created.

At present the soul is united to matter. The body was organized for its service. This is not a state in which its native powers can be fully unfolded. Its exertions however, even now, are astonishing. I confine myself to the impression which we make upon one another. Some souls are congenial. Whenever they meet they act upon one another; they unite, and friendships, of an indissoluble nature, are formed. The pure and gentle, more naturally unite with those who are pure and gentle; the depraved and rough, with those who are depraved and rough. How souls insinuate themselves into each other, and unite, is inexplicable. The fact we know, and it may be of use in the present discussion.

The soul is not the only spiritual nature in the universe. *God* is a spirit, celestials are spirits, and infernals. Are human spirits alone capable of acting upon each other; or may this action and re-action be mutual to spirits in general? It may certainly be mutual. Suggestions often arise,—we know not how. They proceed from a secret quarter. To these many ascribe great part of their knowledge; by these they have been induced to undertake the most brilliant actions. Impressions also are often acknowledged, which forewarn men of danger, or presage happiness; so far our experience carries us. The Jews were of opinion that we had intimate communion with the world of spirits, and might receive from thence either good or bad impressions. The opinion was certainly just. This world cannot be detached. It is connected with the other. If the connection at all subsist, it must with the father of our spirits. This cannot reasonably be denied. He who formed the mind, must know well all its qualities, and be able to affect it in any manner and to any degree.

The possibility of *God's* communicating the knowledge of his will to men, being allowed, it is of importance to enquire.

II. Whether this be *necessary*. Realize

that moment when Adam first came into existence. Suppose him placed in Eden. I see him cast his eye above, and below, on the right hand and the left ; on himself and on ail around. He would immediately conclude the existence of a first cause, infinitely wise, powerful, and good. But he would not have found out for what purpose he was made, nor what service he must do. He could not have known whether he could continue in existence, or again fall into the state from whence he had just awaked. He must have lost himself, even in the labyrinth of delights, and languished in vain conjecture : was his happiness incomplete without the intercourse with a fellow-creature ? How much more so without intercourse with his maker ? The book of nature, indeed, instructed him with respect to the existence of God, and some striking perfections. There it rested. He found himself a creature among myriads of creatures. His distance from God, and ignorance of his origin, his duty, or destination, must have involved an uncertainty inconsistent with happiness. The Mosaic account, therefore, of man's formation, is what we would have expected. The Creator revealed himself to his new made creature ; introduced him to Eden ; gave him it in gift ; instructed him in his duty, and left his blessing with him. All this is so natural, and even necessary,

that I cannot conceive how it could have been otherwise. If the knowledge of God's will was necessary for men from the first, it was more so afterwards : If in the right way, he could not go on with certainty, and satisfaction, without divine communications, much less could he have recovered it, after he had stepped aside, degraded and fallen ; the book of nature could give him no advice ; not the least hint whether he might be forgiven, or in what manner. In thunder it proclaimed the terrors of that power which he had provoked. It left him in awful suspense. In what a situation then, are we left, if we lay aside our bibles.

The possibility of God's communicating his will to mankind being established, and its necessity, we may safely conclude that he has done so, and in the scripture, which my text says has been given by inspiration of God.

The *nature* of this inspiration is

III. The discussion to which I proposed to call your attention.

Each of you have a clear idea of what inspiration means. Our mental powers are capable of *gradual* improvement : but were they to arrive at such improvement *instantaneously*, this

must be in consequence of something supernatural. Were I *immediately* furnished with a full acquaintance with the languages used by the Indian tribes, so as to speak them fluently, this must be by inspiration, although I might arrive at the same attainment in a natural way, through time and attention; or could I discern, and circumstantially relate what is doing at this moment, in France, or Britain, it must be by inspiration, although without inspiration, the person on the spot may discern these things with equal clearness, and relate them as circumstantially.

Supernatural influence may be distinguished both in *kind* and *degree*.

Were a person discoursing or writing, more secured through a supernatural influence upon his mind, from any error in what he said or wrote, than he could otherwise be; I should pronounce him inspired, should there even be no marks of genius in his production; or should another, without this advantage, discourse, or write with equal precision: or were there a book, compiled under such supernatural influence, that what is related, and taught could not possibly have any mixture of error; no doubt this is an inspired book, should the writers relate many things which they saw and heard, as well as what was miraculously communicated. Consistent with this idea of in-

inspiration, as a great variety of phraseology, I shall even allow that more elegant expressions might have been used. This is no objection. Were the scripture indeed declared to be a standard of oratory, every defect of this kind might be urged with reason. But it is a standard of truth, it all be true. Then the phraseology is not so important. A superintending influence, over the minds of all the writers, securing them absolutely from any degree of error in relating even what fell within their own knowledge, is included in that inspiration with which the scriptures were given. Had this been considered, it might have prevented a great torrent of abuse, as if revelation had nothing to do with facts which the writer might relate, as any of us can, what we see and hear.

Beside, this superintending influence, which secured the writers of scripture from any degree of error in what they wrote, a higher influence was sometimes enjoyed, raising the mind to a degree of noble ardour, and sublimity at which it would not have arrived in a natural way. This appears in the song of Moses in many psalms, and in different passages in the epistles of Paul. I see no evidence, however, of its being the design of Providence to mark out those who speak in God's name, by such elevation of sentiment and style since such frequently deliver their message in the plainest and simplest manner.



The most extraordinary degree of inspiration, is where the natural faculties of the prophet were suspended, and he became merely an organ, through whom God communicated his will to men, dictating both the matter and the language by immediate suggestion. This happened in foretelling future events, of which they otherwise could have no idea; but even here, a superintending influence was necessary; that the prophecy might be delivered to others exactly as it was received from God.

What therefore is asserted in my text, and what I must insist upon, is this, that all the writers of scripture, uniformly in these writings, were under such a supernatural influence, that they delivered the whole truth of God, without any degree of mixture or error.

It appears, evidently, that Christ and his apostles believed the Old Testament to have been written in this manner.

It is mentioned as a high honour conferred upon the Jews that, "unto them were committed the *oracles* of God." God had dictated and given authenticity to these scriptures of which the Jews were the guardians. *We have* (says Peter, speaking of the scriptures) *a more sure word of prophecy: whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that*

*shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts. Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*

These words intimate that the prophets did not work themselves up into such agitations as led them to utter the predictions and oracles which are recorded, but were borne on by the Holy Ghost declaring, as his organ, what he disposed them to declare, or what he suggested for the benefit of mankind. In a conversation with the Jews, our Saviour insisted, *Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are Gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came: and the scripture cannot be broken: say ye of him, whom the father hath sanctioned, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?*

Here, not the truth only of the Old Testament is asserted; but what is more, it is asserted that these writings cannot be charged with any impropriety of expression. Their direction in every instance is safe, and their decision infallible. The declaration of my text is positive and universal. All scripture is given by inspiration of God.

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 The writers of the New Testament believed themselves under a divine influence, and delivered their message as the ambassadors of God. Writing to the Thessalonians, the apostle is express, "He that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy spirit." Speaking of the ordinance of the supper, he says, "I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you:"—His assertions to the Ephesians include his fellow apostles, and brethren, as well as himself. *Ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God, which is given me to you-ward; How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; as I wrote afore in few words. Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ. Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets.*

Peter allows the commandment of the apostles equal weight with the words spoken before by the holy prophets, and particularly gives the epistles of Paul the same authenticity with other scriptures. This was perfectly agreeable to their Saviour's assurance, that the spirit should abide with them to guide them into all truth and to bring his instructions to their remembrance.

To this doctrine, which I have been insisting

upon, several passages have been objected, particularly when the apostle says, *Unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband. But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. Now, concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgement, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful: I suppose, therefore, that this is good for the present distress: I say, that it is good for a man so to be. The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth: but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord. But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgement: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God.*

Inspired writers, say objectors, would not have spoken thus. The objection here as generally ariseth from inattention to the passage. The laws of christianity, with respect to persons in a single or married life, are here stated. Some cases had been taken notice of by our Saviour, during his personal ministry, and decided upon: he had said nothing of other cases. These were reserved for his servant speaking in his name. The apostle points out the cases which had been decided upon by our Saviour in person; and the cases also which not yet decided upon, received now the decision of the

apostle. The apostle was writing to those who questioned his apostleship. His expressions, in this view, appear very suitable: *I think, I have the spirit of God—I give my judgment as one who hath obtained mercy.* Which expressions, in this connection, assert in very intelligible and proper language, his being, in these decisions, divinely inspired. Other objections of a similar kind appear, on examination, to be equally futile.

The most extraordinary objection against revelation, which I recollect to have seen urged, is; admit that a thing is revealed to me, the moment I communicate it to others, it cannot with them have the weight of revelation, but becomes hear-say, which they may treat as they please. This strikes at the root of all human testimony, nay, it declares it impossible for God to make known his will thro' any medium—it must be immediately or not at all. The objection goes farther than those by whom it is made, intend; it strikes at every medium of communication, even the heavens and the earth as instructors, these are opaque bodies, introduced between, the creature and the Creator, and must not be admitted.

It is absurd to say that God may communicate the knowledge of himself to mankind through the imperfect medium of the inanimate creation, and yet the more perfect medium of the rational creation be rejected. I

know not that I ever met a weaker, or more irrational assertion. Indeed I would not take it merely on the word of any man that God had spoken to him, I must have some evidence thereof; this I would require in any testimony in which I am nearly concerned, but satisfied of this evidence, I could no more disbelieve the testimony in the one case than in the other.

In the darkness with which we are invested in this world, is it not desirable to have a light for our direction, on which we can depend? Is it not reasonable to follow that light even when it lays open a view which, in many respects, astonishes our finite capacities? Because somethings are more difficult, shall I refuse to avail myself of what is useful and easy? No reason can justify such conduct. The scripture is our only guide. Improve it as such. Let it be the light to your feet, and the lamp to your way. Meditate on it day and night; let it dwell in you; let it be your delight, and your counsellor; you shall find it perfect, converting the soul; sure, making wise the simple; right, rejoicing the heart; pure, enlightening the eyes. It will warn you against transgression; it will reward your obedience.

Having God's commandments in your heart you will, no doubt, find it your duty, and you

*will think it your pleasure to teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.*

When men neither read their bibles, nor follow their direction; when children are brought up like heathens, having no knowledge of the scriptures, nor reverence for them, it is no wonder if these be despised and every trifler, however ignorant of the scripture, and palpably wrong in the most known facts, who chooses, notwithstanding, to laugh at them, be listened to as an oracle, and be circulated through many nations, I see nothing reasonable in this. If we be in an error, make it appear. Substantiate assertions with proper evidence. But scorn is no argument. It may amuse the inconsiderate. It can never have any weight with those who think for themselves. Such attempts against christianity are to me an evidence of its truth. Men never use such weapons when better ones are in their power.

Thus circumstanced, it is for the credit, as well as the comfort of christians, not only to believe, but also to be able to give a reason for their faith; to know that they do not follow a cunningly divided fable, and also to convince others of this.

For this purpose I have entered on the present series of discourses. The times appeared to demand it. Your comfort demands it, and your establishment. It has been demanded by duty. In season we are to preach: to make full proof of the ministry: to be zealous for the truth: particularly since those perilous times have commenced, when men will not endure sound doctrine, but, renouncing the truth, are turned unto fables.

Having at present stated the possibility, the necessity and nature of inspiration, I shall, God willing, look into the scriptures themselves, and see what evidence they give of being inspired writings. I am aware of the arduous nature of that work which I have undertaken. I feel also the delicacy of my situation, from the various lights in which this undertaking may appear to those for whose benefit I labour: All this I have weighed, and all is counterbalanced from a desire to do my duty, in the execution of which, let me have your countenance and your prayers. The success of the ministry depends as much on the hearer as on the speaker, for your own sake, for the gospel's sake—"Brethren pray for us."



## DISCOURSE III.

INSPIRATION ARGUED FROM THE SCRIPTURES THEMSELVES.

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PSALMS CXIX. 18.

*Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.*

**T**HIS psalm was written by David. It has something curious in the texture. It contains as many parts as there are letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Each part consists of eight verses, and begins with the latter, where-with it is particularly distinguished. The design of the whole, is to discover the great advantages which may be derived from studying the scriptures, especially when divine illumination attends that study.

I have already illustrated the apostle's assertion that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God;" insisting upon the *possibility*, the *necessity* and *nature* of such inspiration. The same influence under which the scripture was writ-

ten, is in its measure, necessary that we may read with judgment and advantage. Under this influence wondrous discoveries may be expected from God's law. Let us, depending thereon, attend to these discoveries.

What is it a reasonable person would expect from revelation? No doubt some account of the world and of that power by which it has been produced; the origin of mankind, their character, their duties, their prospects, all this is found in the scripture. I shall enquire first what the old testament says of these things, and then, what the new.

The Old Testament opens with an account of creation. Nothing can be conceived more astonishing. A pompous description is, no doubt expected, which unfolds the powers of nature, and leaves nothing doubtful in the system of astronomy. Such the composition, had it been human; but its ease and simplicity argues it divine. Room is left for philosophic researches. The laws of nature, which common minds cannot penetrate, may be sought after: with such researches religion has no immediate concern. It is accommodated to all. The instruction is not above the dull-est capacity, nor unworthy of the most brilliant. Things are spoken of as they appear to every one; nor is any thing said contradictory

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to the most astonishing discoveries. The simple truth intelligible to all, and of chief importance, is clearly stated at the very opening of scripture. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth;" and afterwards, "God created man in his own image." This is the foundation of all religion. The subject unfolds as our acquaintance with the scripture increases, leaving the mind impressed with the necessity of loving the Lord our God with all our heart, and all our soul, and all our minds, as a first and indispensable duty. The foundation also for the other branch of duties, is thus early laid, when we see all nations springing from the same root, and from this circumstance having reason to love their neighbours as they love themselves. The first chapter of Genesis therefore, not only discovers the origin of this world, but also lays the foundation for all the duties of a religious or moral kind, which we owe either to God or to each other. Here we have the ground work of the whole scripture. A light breaks upon us which becomes more evident, obligations are felt which every page enforces. The language is as admirable as the subject. To this the best and most unexceptionable judges bear witness. Longinus, whose good taste has been the admiration of ages, who also was a Heathen, from mere conviction gives the highest character of the writings of Moses. "The

“Jewish legislator,” says he, in his treatise on the sublime, “no ordinary person, having conceived a just idea of the power of God, has nobly expressed it in the beginning of his law. “and God said,”—what?—“Let there be light, and there was light, let the earth be, and the earth was.”

I have been the more particular in this statement, to shew the propriety of revelation's opening as it does. That Moses did write this account, and it was communicated to him, will be examined afterwards; in the mean time it must strike every one, that a better introduction to the knowledge of God, and of our duty cannot be conceived. It has been urged that the Mosaic account of the creation contradicts the truth, and discourages all philosophical investigations; I must contend that no such contradiction is found therein, and that it discourages no such investigations. Persons indeed of influence in the church may have taken unwarrantable steps, which have had such a tendency, carefully distinguish the actions of men from the principles which ought to regulate these actions. Revert to the scriptures themselves. They contain no such contradictions; they bring forth none of the discouragements mentioned. An objection of this kind, from the man too who has made it his business to fix our attention to principles, is the more invidious; it shews something worse

than ignorance. He takes things for granted which cannot be proved; and then builds an airy fabrick, spacious indeed, but unsubstantial. Is such an investigation worthy of notice? Is it rational? or even just? Nothing can be more unfair, nor contradictory to his own principles in other instances.

As the scripture gives us an account of the origin of the world, it also exposes the character of mankind; which is not *now* what it was *once*. Man was made innocent; but fell from his innocency. The Mosaic account of this has employed the wit of deistical writers time immemorial, upon this they have exhausted their obliquy; irony flashes from every page of their writings. The best way of dealing with such opposers, is simply to state the truth. Let light enter, darkness of itself will go away.

If Adam was indebted to God for existence, for Paradise, for enjoyments of an intellectual, as well as animal nature, had not such a benefactor every right to command, and dispose of him? If his authority was absolute, could not his wisdom decide on that command which was the proper test of obedience? An indifferent action is fixed upon; this tree I retain, the rest are yours; neither look upon what I withhold, nor touch it, nor eat of its fruit:—

Was not this a reasonable command? If all belonged to God, might he not give any part, or retain any part? And if he was pleased to interpose his command, shall a disputing thought arise? A murmuring word be heard? Obedience was acknowledging God's right in all, and honouring his authority. Disobedience was to dispute his right, to throw off his authority: It included every crime, highly aggravated, Adam therefore was guarded against it, by severe penalties. Creatures, even the highest and most pure have been made changeable. It was in their power to stand or to fall. Some stood, some fell; Adam was put on an equal footing with others. There was no necessity upon him to be disobedient; nay, every thing encouraged his obedience. Still his will was free.

Think for a moment of his temptations. Eve was first deceived; but how? In innocence. Angels were, probably, very familiar with our first parents. Their conversation was welcome; as it was instructive. They became visible in different shapes. The human, no doubt, was the most common; but not exclusive of others. Sometimes it was a cherub, or beautiful flying ox; at other times a seraph, or winged shining serpent. In this last shape the fallen spirit might have introduced himself to Eve, referring, probably, to

which, the apostles says, "Satan himself is  
 transformed into an angel of light." Eve,  
 believing herself talking with an angel, might  
 easily be persuaded that she had misunderstood  
 the divine command, or that it had been al-  
 tered, under such deceit she eat, and had influ-  
 ence enough with her husband to involve him  
 in the same transgression. I need not expati-  
 ate on the atrocity of the crime. This must  
 strike every reasonable person. It incurred se-  
 vere punishment. All this appears natural.  
 It might have been expected that God would  
 exact of men, some test of obedience. A pos-  
 sibility of their falling was inseparable from the  
 condition of creatures. The whole transacti-  
 on is solemn and suitable. If obedience would  
 have transmitted benefits of the most impor-  
 tant nature to distant ages, why should not  
 disobedience extend the calamity as far as obe-  
 dience would the benefit. That such cala-  
 mity is endured, is matter of fact, felt by men  
 in all ages, and the account of it herein given,  
 is as satisfactory as any which has ever been  
 given. It is easy to *laugh*, and by blending  
 truth and fable in one story, as a late writer  
 has done, to produce a ridiculous scene. Such  
 attempts in a matter of so much moment is  
 highly censurable. Let such writers, reject-  
 ing the Mosaic account, give us a better one,  
 which none of them pretend to do, whereby  
 they may resolve our enquiries with respect to

the general depravity of mankind, and the ills which every where prevail; or keeping exactly to the Mosaic account without any foreign mixture. Let them shew its absurdity: neither have they done this. I must then insist, that such persons trifle with mankind, and deserve rather their pity as madmen, than their ear as prudent counsellors.

After man's defection from his duty is unfolded, the Old Testament proceeds to discover the consequence. It drew depravity and ruin, not on Adam and Eve only, but on all their descendants. But how can this be proved? By the most unanswerable of all arguments, plain, universal, and well-authenticated facts. Individuals, families, and nations are brought in view. Cain grew a monster for his impiety, and murderous designs. His descendants trod too exactly in his footsteps; Lamach was particularly notorious; nay, impiety, cruelty, and bloodshed became so common, that it was necessary that the divine displeasure be discovered bringing upon such a race, a general deluge. It is not probable that wickedness since the flood, has ever risen so universally to such an height, yet the general tendency to wickedness is too evident. Noah, although eminent for his piety was overtaken with intoxication. Ham, one of his children, discovered, by disgraceful conduct, the utter depravity of his disposition. The building of



X Babel proceeded from an ill view. It seems  
 to have been Noah's design to divide the earth  
 among his sons, and to dismiss each to his res-  
 pective allotment. They were not compliant.  
 X Babel probably was built to enable them, effec-  
 tually to thwart Noah's design. It however  
 only hastened the dispersion. Removed from  
 X the eye of Noah, they paid little attention to  
 religion, which soon lost its original simplicity.  
 Abraham and his family are brought in view,  
 that God in his dealings with them might  
 awaken men to a sense of their duty. Although  
 persons of distinguished piety arose from this  
 family, in all we observe great blemishes. Ja-  
 cob by no means acted the fair part with Esau,  
 Simeon and Levi were guilty of wanton cru-  
 elty; ever under oppression in Egypt, the treat-  
 ment of the Israelites to each other cannot be  
 justified; a stronger picture of an irreligious,  
 inconsiderate, stiff-necked disposition cannot be  
 drawn than what we have of the wanderers in  
 the wilderness. Sampson, whose strength of  
 body could repress the force of armies, fell a  
 victim to his own passions. David's mind,  
 tender under affliction, enfeebled through re-  
 pose, was hardened to commit a complicated  
 and atrocious crime. Solomon's wisdom to-  
 wards the conclusion of his reign was disgraced  
 with an egregious act of folly. Abra-  
 ham's faith; by unbelief. The scripture re-  
 lates faithfully these facts. The inference is

left for the reader. Human nature has been the same from the beginning that it is now. It is desperately wicked. No species of folly, of debauchery, of crimes of which it is not capable. The scripture here is a faithful witness. If a different account been given, it had been false. This circumstance, which speaks most distinctly, the authenticity of scripture, has been used as a weapon for its overthrow. No perversion is so insufferable. What can a late writer mean by laying, "When we read the obscene stories, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and torturous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness; with which more than half the bible is filled, it would be more consistent that we called it the word of a Demon, than the word of God." This is a strange passage. Were I to relate the death of the king of France, and insist on some preceding severities, am I, because I relate these things, any ways accountable for that death or these severities? If I paint any crime in its native deformity, in order to deter all from the commission thereof. Is this the work of a Demon? Do esit not rather deserve praise than blame? The scripture draws a distorted character. The character indeed deserves the highest detestation. It transforms men into brutes, or devils—but the scripture has no blame. It acts the office of a friend. It would convince men of their wickedness, that

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it might turn them from it, and lead them in the right way. Were this considered, unbelievers would not allow themselves to snarl and carp as they do, at the scripture representations. When these discovered the folly, inconsistency, and wickedness of human nature, every thought would be absorbed in this one. " Ah, that is my picture, were it not for restraining grace;—shall I detest the book that perpetuates this picture and places it before me? Rather let me detest the heart capable of such depravity; I must, as a sinner, be as odious to God as I am hateful to myself. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death!"

But does the Old Testament present us with the gloomy view only? No. It also introduces light. Prospects open to awaken to comfort, and direct the sons of men.

X The exclusion after the fall from the tree of life, whatever derision this circumstance has occasioned, was in pity to mankind. The fruit of that tree contained a juice which tended to immortalize the body. A life of misery, and change protracted during endless ages had been a dreadful curse. Although death be a state of degradation and punishment, still it is desirable in our present circumstances. Adam soon found that all was not lost. A victory is gained over the serpent. The mischief

which his wiles had occasioned to mankind, should be removed. Man might yet be happy: the honour of the divine law secured, and his nature renovated. It should still be possible for him to walk with God on earth, and dwell with him in heaven. He must be indebted to another. Sacrifices in use from the first, and the Jewish ritual established afterwards at Sinai were appointed of God to impress this upon the mind. Reason could not have dictated such a practice. Its origin and universal adoption must have proceeded from revelation only. X  
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Obstacles in the way of man's acceptance with God, being removed, the renovation of his nature was also provided for. The agent here is the Holy Spirit. Often is he mentioned in the Old Testament. The saints ascribe their holiness to his influence. Taking from sinners the stony heart, he causes them to walk in God's statutes, to keep his judgments, and to do them. Besides this influence, proper motives are placed before them, in the judgements which fall on the wicked, and the mercies with which the righteous were visited. The book of Ecclesiastes dissuades men from earthly and sensual conduct; the book of Psalms encourages a devout and heavenly spirit. The Proverbs afford a variety of maxims of a moral and religious kind for our conduct in life; and all the prophets in their instruction ad- X

dress equally the hopes and fears of mankind.

2  
X  
There is no doubt but the belief of a future state was cherished by the Old Testament. This doctrine was known to Adam. He often conversed with the inhabitants of the spiritual world; and was certain that he possessed an immortal principle. Enoch was removed before the flood from earth to heaven, in a visible manner; Elijah after the flood. Abraham had his eye fixed upon a heavenly country. The martyrs in the days of Maccabeus, believed in a better resurrection. All the saints possessed this faith, and received therefrom great encouragement

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The Old Testament was written at different times, by persons of various capacities, and in places exceedingly remote, yet they harmonize in a wonderful degree. Every where we find the same doctrines, and precepts. All is unison.

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Their credibility is further established, when sacred, is viewed in connection with profane history. The tradition of the golden age, is derived from the state of innocency. The nectar and ambrosia, which the heathens supposed preserved their Gods in immortality, from the tree of life: hence also the idea of the great Panacea, or universal medicine so much

celebrated by the poets. What the poets say of the giants, evidently alludes to the state of things before the destruction of the old world. Deucalions's story, as related by Ovid, is the tradition concerning the flood. I only mention these things now, they will again occur and be discussed in their proper place.

If we really wish to be satisfied whether the scriptures be indeed the word of God, in perusing them, be serious and unbiassed; depend also in doing so, on that spirit by which they have been dictated, to give us a considerate discerning mind. It shall not be in vain. Multitudes have found this volume an inestimable treasure. It has made them acquainted with God, and with themselves; with their duty of a moral, and religious kind; with their business on earth; and their way to heaven. The direction which this book has given; the comfort which it has inspired, the restraints which it has laid, and the encouragements which it has afforded, have obliged men to confess that it is more to be desired than gold, yea than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and the honey comb.

My observations on the New Testament, shall be very short. If even in the Old Testament, we have such traces of a divine revelation, they are more evident in the *new*. In both we see the same system, The first elements

of religion are given us in the one; in the other religion is brought to perfection.

The four Evangelists and the Acts of the Apostles give us the history of our Saviour, and of his apostles. What, in our Saviour's birth was supernatural, might have been expected. "A virgin," says the prophet, "shall bring forth a son." Was there in this any thing above creative power, or was that power ever exerted on a more noble occasion, than in producing the holy thing denominated the Son of God? In the ordinary course of things, human nature would have had an original taint. It, in this instance, must be perfectly pure: To effect which, God steps out of his ordinary way. And shall we object? If his way be in the sea, and his path in the deep waters. If his counsels be unsearchable. This might have been expected. With the simplicity of children, with the tractability of scholars, let us listen, let us believe. The matter of fact indeed fell under the cognizance of few witnesses; but these were very credible. The character both of Mary and Joseph, was reputable. Their story was thoroughly weighed by Zacharias and Elizabeth. It was credible from former prophecy. The future events in the life of Jesus added to its credibility. The man so ready to say with Thomas, unless I see, I will not believe, ought with equal readiness, to yield to those convictions which overcame, in

Joseph, the strongest suspicions, of which the human mind is capable.

The disciples, who were Jews in ordinary life, without the advantages of learning, and of general converse with the world, were not attached to the systems of other nations; nay, were probably unacquainted with them, and so far as these were known, had insuperable objections against them; besides, they neither possessed inclination, nor capacity to form any system which could command general attention. They were merely agents. Jesus instructed them and sent them forth in his name; of their divine commission, they produced full evidence. It was not material whether our Saviour was pleased himself to write what was for the instruction of the church in future ages, or furnished his disciples to do so, and placed them under such a superintending influence, that they could commit no mistake. It is far from being true, that employing these as agents, was absolutely necessary. Our Saviour might himself have written the christian system, and left it as his last legacy to the church. We find him writing on a memorable occasion. It is not for us to dictate. Infinite wisdom has regulated this matter so as is most conducive to promote the designs of the gospel. Meek and humble minds have perfect satisfaction. It was, perhaps, fit that infidels have



something on which to vent the rancor of their perverted besotted minds.

The doctrines of the New Testament are spiritual and sublime. Their lustre blinds the prejudiced, who, not perceiving their nature, speak of them with contempt. The incarnation and death of the Son of God, as an atonement for mankind, give particular offence. It is observable that this has been the uniform doctrine of scripture. It was taught our first parents in Eden. It was believed by Abel. It was illustrated by all the institutions of the Jewish church. It produced in the patriarchs and prophets, confidence and joy. It breeds admiration in Angels. The redeemed above cease not to celebrate his praise, who loved them and washed them from their sins in his blood. These considerations may well outweigh the insulting surmises of a presumptuous man. The dispensation itself is astonishing. We see the plan only in an imperfect state. It may be founded in reasons which we cannot now penetrate. We may dispute to our ruin; but it is most prudent as well as safe to believe.

The Deity is represented in the most amiable and worthy light. He is proposed as our pattern. The precepts deduced from the christian system, are so suitable, that practised, they would change this wilderness into paradise,

earth into heaven, the tumult of war and contention into a desirable and lasting calm. Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report: If there be any virtue, if there be any praise, they are proposed to our attentive consideration, and enforced by striking examples.

If you read the word prejudiced against it, and determined to turn it into ridicule, you cannot expect that God will open your eyes and discover to you the wondrous things found in his law, he will rather leave you to believe a lie, and allow your hearts to be hardened by that fire which softens others, to your utter ruin.

You will easily perceive, and I hope you will keep in mind, the method which I have proposed to myself, in the defence, which, depending on divine assistance, I have undertaken, of our holy religion, against the levels of infidels and the sneer of fools.

I have stated the possibility, the necessity, and nature of inspiration, and have shewn that the writers of scripture, claim our attention as writing under such inspiration. I have now adduced my first proof. Looking into the scriptures, we find every thing there we would expect from a revelation. It was necessary to

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begin with this, for if, as the enemies of revelation say, scripture contains any thing unworthy of God, or ruinous to man, no further proof is necessary. The bible ought to be rejected as a spurious production. Nothing, however, of this kind, has appeared, but the very reverse, every thing is worthy of God, and beneficial to men.

After speaking of the Old and the New Testaments, I shall next shew the confirmation which revelation receives from prophecy and miracle, shall speak of the use of reason in religion, and then prove the antiquity of scripture, taking notice of its writers, of its publication, and the credibility which it receives from the testimony of other history. The plan is extensive. I shall endeavour to keep every discussion distinct, and to be as full and satisfactory in each discussion as my abilities, and opportunities admit.

## DISCOURSE IV,

INSPIRATION ARGUED FROM PROPHECY.

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 PSALMS, c,xlvii. 5.
*His understanding is infinite.*

**I**T is a general opinion that this psalm, in which the devout Jews celebrated the perfections of God, manifested in a great deliverance, was written after the captivity. Having spoken of God's goodness and power. The psalmist adds, "His understanding is infinite." To this attribute I am now, through divine assistance, to call your attention. Infinite understanding is discovered in the exact knowledge which God has of all his works. He sees what is past, or what is to come with equal precision as what is present, of nothing can he be ignorant, whether the actions of angels or of men: things done in the visible or invisible world, what takes place in time or in eternity. A knowledge so extensive, so minute, exceeds our comprehensi-

on. It can belong to God only. If writings can be found which contain such knowledge, to such writings is affixed the seal of heaven. I am now to contend that this sacred volume, whence originates all our hopes, is thus declared to be the word of God. Discoveries of a wonderful nature are made by the prophets in these scriptures, as a standing proof of their authenticity.

I shall endeavour *first*, to fix precise ideas to the term *prophet*, and *prophecy*, and shall then produce, as a specimen, some prophecies that from these I may illustrate the attestation given to our holy religion from prophecy in general.

The term *prophet*, is of Greek origin, signifying to predict, or foretell. The corresponding terms in the Hebrew language express the one, the man who sees; the other the man who divines. Through that supernatural impulse, under which the prophets acted, they were enabled to instruct the people in their duty with precision and authority. A hymn was sometimes suggested to the mind suitable for celebrating the praise of the Almighty, which they could immediately clothe with words, and set off with proper melodious tunes. When a number were together, the same thoughts arising in their minds, and the same expressions occurring, they, at one instant, in

the same words, poured forth the same prayer. Under this influence also, the prophet foretold future events. "Every one of you," says the apostle, of a christian church under a divine inspiration, "hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation." Let it also be observed, that when this extraordinary influence fell on every one, it frequently threw him into an ecstasy, agitating and convulsing the whole frame in an astonishing manner. When any were thrown into a violent agitation, which gave them an unnatural frantic appearance, they were said to prophecy whatever was the cause of that agitation. As the heathen poets instructed their countrymen in religion, the apostles calls them prophets. When the minds of Saul and his servants were under such a supernatural commanding influence, that their ill designs against David were suspended, and every thought was absorbed in celebrating the praise of God, they are said to prophecy.

I have thus introduced my observations on prophecies, to remove the uneasiness which the ignorant and presumptuous assertions of a late writer may have occasioned, who says that the bible, by a prophet, means a poet, and by prophesying, making verses. I should not even mention assertions which might well disgrace any man of common sense, were it not that they receive currency, without examination,

because the man by whom they are made, has, by his writings, in other instances, acquired among many, some reputation.

I now proceed to produce, as a specimen, some prophecies, that from these I may illustrate the attestation given to our holy religion from prophecy in general.

I begin with speaking of the flood. Enoch's prophecy was in possession of the antideluvian world for near a thousand years; he foretold a great calamity, threatening the wicked, in which their wickedness should receive a severe and exemplary punishment. Noah illustrated this prophecy, explaining its nature, and fixing precisely, the period when the punishment should be inflicted, one hundred and twenty years before that period arrived. No mind could penetrate so far into futurity, far less could an event be conceived of, hitherto unexamplified, and altogether improbable. It was not a fortunate conjecture in this venerable Antideluvian. He was certain that God had spoken to him, and was so impressed with the assurance of the impending ruin, that he set in earnest about providing for his own safety. The Chaldean historian, Berosus, gives an account very corresponding to the Mosaic. He speaks of ten kings of Chaldea before the flood. Ten generations intervened between Adam and Noah. The last of the ten kings, says

Berosus, was warned by a dream of a flood, and provided a vessel for his safety. X

Abraham had a distinct view of what should befall his descendants for a long series of years, *Know, says the divine oracle, of a surety, that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.*

Abraham's prospects were good. His character was respectable, and his circumstances wealthy. An eye less penetrating than the divine, could not have foreseen these changes through which his posterity should pass.

Moses rests the whole credit of his law on two circumstances, in themselves more than doubtful, which no prudent person, much less an experienced legislator, would have done, had he not acted under divine authority. Every male was required to repair thrice a year, to Jerusalem; every seventh year the lands must lie uncultivated. In the ordinary course of things, the enemies with whom they were environed would take that opportunity



of laying waste their lands. Famine would be introduced by so unprecedented a practice, but God assured them, from the exact knowledge he had of all hearts, whether then in existence, or to come into existence at the appointed period, that when obeying his command, no man should desire their land, and that the earth, by an abundance on the sixth year, unknown in the other five, should afford a full supply for the succeeding, so as to enable them with great safety, to submit to the divine requisition. What a minute acquaintance with the hearts of men, and with natural causes; and what a controuling power over them, in the coming, as well as the existing generation, to rest the whole weight of the Mosaic œconomy, on such a circumstance. An understanding which was not infinite, could never have penetrated the secrets of the heart, as well as those of nature: nor would common prudence have allowed Moses to risk his reputation on what, had it been a cheat, might so frequently have been exposed. I have fixed your attention to what appears to me a standing miracle, as well as a standing prophecy, in attestation of the divine authority of the Mosaic law.

The captivity of the Jews in Babylon, and the precise period of its duration had been foretold long before it took place, nay, the very name and victories of the deliverer had

one hundred and fifty years previous to his birth, been mentioned in the prophecy of Isaiah. *Seventy* years were fixed upon for the captivity, and Cyrus was named as the instrument in the hand of providence for the restoration of the Jews; nothing was left uncertain in this prophecy. It was read to Cyrus after he became head of the Babylonian empire, for he mentions it in the decree which gave the Jews their liberty, and no doubt it had its weight in determining him to such an act. This circumstance shews the existence of the prophecy among the Jews, a long time previously to the events to which it refers. Now was the period according to that prophecy, when God should deliver his people; and Cyrus was the instrument which he should employ. The devout Jews could never have dreamed of such a deliverance had it not been foretold, nor would any have had the boldness to impose a forgery upon Cyrus; or if they had, his known wisdom had rendered such an imposition very vain. If history, in any instance, deserves credibility, it does in this, that such a prophecy did exist, and has in the minutest circumstances, been exactly accomplished.

The prophecies of Daniel are plain, and decisive. I cannot be particular on this subject. I shall mention one circumstance. Alexander, deliberating on his expedition against Persia, was encouraged in a dream, by

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a man, in a dress which was new to him, who assured him of success. He had entered on the expedition when he found it necessary to punish the Jews who adhered to Persia. On his march against Jerusalem, he was met by the high priest in his robes; the very person, and in the very robes seen in his dream. The appearance diverted him from the vengeance which he had determined to take. He did reverence to the high priest, and offered sacrifices in the temple. The prophecies of Daniel were shewn him, which predict, in the most circumstantial manner, the overthrow of the Persian empire. They inspired him with confidence in his undertaking. The Jews who were entrusted with these prophecies he honored, and granted them every indulgence which they could wish—nay, Porphyry, a learned and ingenious philosopher, in the third century, and the most formidable and embittered enemy, with whom christianity ever struggled, was so convinced of the exact fulfilment of the prophecies of Daniel, that he could no otherwise evade the argument thence in favour of our holy religion, than by absurdly supposing, in the face of the most incontestable evidence, that these were written, under the name of Daniel by some person, at a late period, after the events, said to be foretold, had come to pass. Prophecies so unequivocal, so circumstantial, so plain, to which even enemies give their attestation, are a proof of the

divine authority of scriptures which cannot be invalidated.

Our Saviour's prediction concerning Jerusalem, deserves great attention. Its overthrow is foretold;—it should be an entire overthrow, and take place whilst the present generation yet existed. Prefages of its approach are specified. Directions are given to those who, when these appeared, would secure their personal safety. Let any considerate person read our Saviour's prophecy in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew, and at the same time look at Josephus's account of the destruction of Jerusalem, and he will certainly be convinced, that our Saviour had the most exact knowledge of what afterwards took place, and gave a minute and intelligible prediction.

It must appear to every one who considers how circumstantially all these prophecies have been given, that an opponent of revelation, who has lately come into view, discovers a rashness and ignorance, which is truly pitiable, when he speaks of prophecies as delivered in such equivocal language, as to fit almost any circumstance that might happen afterwards, and deridingly adds, "that shooting with a long bow of a thousand years, to strike within a thousand miles of a mark, the ingenuity of posterity could make it point blank." Neither groundless assertions, nor loud laughs,

can command any authority with those who seriously enquire after the truth.

I shall call your attention to one prophecy more, but which, from its great importance, and the illustrations which it repeatedly receives, may be considered as the leading prophecy of scripture, it respects the Messiah, in whose appearance and character all, whither Jews or Gentiles, are nearly concerned. He is spoken of as the desire of all nations, who, destroying the works of the devil, should introduce universal righteousness and peace. Adam knew him as the seed of the woman; Isaiah as the son of a virgin. David as a king, whose throne would be established forever; Daniel as cut off, for the benefit of others; Micah as putting an end to injustice and war; Malachi as purifying the sons of Levi, that they might offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. The former dispensation, and the various changes in the state of empires, all tended to make way for the Messiah, and to introduce his government. The moment when he should appear, and enter on the execution of his office, was precisely fixed. Four hundred years from Cyrus's decree, in favour of the Jews, brought forward the happy moment, to which the eyes of all were directed. The prophecy was so plain, and circumstantial, that all the world were about this time looking out for some illustrious personage, from whom they expected great advantages.

The Jews were enquiring after him who was to come : the gentiles were expecting the return of the golden age. Virgil's fourth epilogue strongly expresses this expectation. How the expectation was raised, cannot so easily be ascertained. It might from the scriptures themselves, which were in such circulation, that the inquisitive had it in their power to peruse them, or from the Sibylline oracles over which evil demons presided ; but which, occasionally were constrained to give an unwilling attestation to the truth. Virgil was not singular in his expectation. Both Suetonius, and Tacitus mention a prevailing opinion, derived from their sacred writings that about this time, some from Judea should obtain the government. Virgil took the advantage of this state of men's minds to compliment his patron, the consul Asinius Polico, at the birth of his son Saloninus, as if this were the person promised to bless the nations. That in both Jews and Gentiles, an unusual expectation was excited, is certain. It is equally certain that their views were too gross, and earthly. The person expected came, but so different from what their imaginations painted, that to the Jews he was a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. But he did not live and die in vain. He has established a kingdom on earth. Opposition it has met with, and shall meet with, but it shall stand, it shall increase, it shall be-

come universal. Of this the book of revelation makes us certain : persons versed in these kinds of studies, know well that many things therein foretold, have been accomplished ; many things are now accomplishing, even that infidelity, which now so generally prevails, is consonant to what has been foreseen, and confirms the prediction, but when the whole shall be accomplished, Christ indeed shall reign on earth, and restore to mankind the innocency and happiness of the paradisaical state.

The prophecies of scripture are not delivered in the same language, as facts. Lifting too high the awful veil which conceals futurity, must, in many instances, have been improper, neither are these prophecies couched in terms which might be accommodated to whatever should happen. There are certain principles by which the prophetic language may be determined. The language of the prophecies which have been accomplished, with the events which were in view, must be contrasted with the language of the prophecies yet to be accomplished, whence some idea may be formed of what is to be expected. An attentive examination of scripture language, with an accurate acquaintance with history, is necessary, in order to pursue profitably inquiries of this nature. Thus Daniel found out that the deliverance of his people was at hand. The Jews thus could ascertain when the Messiah should make his

appearance. Mr. Fleming who searched after prophetic knowledge, writing about an hundred years ago, was certain from the revelation of John, that a revolution would take place in France, previously to the year 1794. Different writers have lately treated the subject of prophecies with great sagacity. No knowledge of any kind, can be acquired without pains. It argues great rashness to pronounce on subjects with which we have no acquaintance. It is easy for an ignorant person to say that none can acquire information with respect to the planets and their motions. Such assertions, however, no ways affect these studies. It is the same with prophecy. If a man has never turned his thoughts that way, he may pronounce them *enigmatical*, and *trifling*: but it is not a proof of a considerate person, to make such assertions until he examines into the matter, lest he expose, at once, his folly and rancour at revelation.

What a glorious attestation do prophecies afford our holy religion. A mind less comprehensive than divine, could never view events so various, so contingent, so distant in time and place, with such exactness, and mark them out as circumstantially as if they were present. Discoveries of this nature are made in scripture. As the events which are foretold come forward, they afford new and irresistible evidences of the truth of revelations. That scripture has this seal of heaven, is not the belief of



Weak and credulous minds only, but also of the most discerning. Sir Isaac Newton, to whom we are indebted for our acquaintance with the solar system, was so well assured of the truth of prophecies, that he has illustrated them by a judicious and useful commentary. Our holy religion possesses attestations of the most satisfactory nature, but man will not take the trouble to examine these, it is not their wish that revelation be true, and they speak according to their wishes. Such conduct is common in our age. It is a crime of an aggravated nature. It cries for vengeance. The time has been, when the enemies of our religion were unashamed of their opposition, and could venture to carry it on in the dark only, and in an underhanded manner; now they assert their unfounded systems, and daring blasphemies, openly, in the most frequented companies, and even in public prints. It is very strange that the friends of revelation cannot amuse themselves with the transactions of the day, without also being shocked with silly ideas at what they account most sacred, and of higher moment than even life, or any of its enjoyments. It will be necessary for them, if such practices continue, to unite in denying themselves an innocent and proper amusement, rather than be repeatedly wounded by attacks upon religion of the most insolent and offensive kind. Were the subject easily and rationally discussed, the friends of religion are always ready to meet

any on this ground, and to give an account of the faith which is in them; but running into unsupported assertions, virulent reproaches, and insolent scorn, neither their inclination, their honor, nor their religion, allow them to meet any on such ground.

I am persuaded every serious enquirer will be impressed with the attestations given to our holy religion, others, as they do not desire to know the truth, must stand to all the consequences of remaining in ignorance.

Having now illustrated the glorious attestation afforded our holy religion from prophecy, I ought next to shew the attestation given it from miracles.

## DISCOURSE V.

INSPIRATION ARGUED FROM MIRACLES.

ACTS viii. 13.

*Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.*

**I**T has universally been expected that men, acting under divine authority, should confirm their pretensions by some miracles. The nature of miracles may be better understood by bringing some in view, than by any definition. They commanded from Philip, preaching the gospel of Christ, among the Samaritans, attention and belief; nay, not from the Samaritans only, but from Simon himself, who was profoundly versed in every species of deceit which could impose upon mankind, but of such powers as Philip possessed, he had no idea. "Simon himself believed also, and

“ when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.”

It is evidently deducible from these words, that miracles are a proper attestation to the scripture, and that those which are true, have an intrinsic value, of which others are destitute. I shall, at present attempt, through divine assistance, the illustration of both these particulars. I shall offer no definitions, nor lay down nice distinctions. I shall simply state, a few facts, and then draw some conclusions.

Before the days of Moses, miracles are nowhere mentioned. They were not previously known, nor was it necessary that they should. The nearer we approach the beginning of the world, the more simplicity appears. Of God's revealing himself to mankind no doubt was entertained. In succeeding ages the original tradition became more obscure and men's imaginations vain. They could not confine themselves to the simple truth, first it was *disguised*, then *questioned*, and at last *denied*. This was the state of things in Egypt. Moses could not gain credit, on his own testimony, that God had spoken to him in the bush, Pharaoh demanded some proof of his acting under divine authority, which might exceed whatever could be effected by the deepest researches into nature: with this Moses compli-

ed. He wrought miracles of various kinds; a controuling power was discovered over all the elements. The air was turned into darkness, of so uncommon a nature, that they could neither kindle any fire, nor keep any flame alive. It distracted the timorous, and agitated the most undaunted. The hail was dreadful; and the fire withered every thing green; an odious swarm was produced; and the most pernicious insects invaded the land; diseases fell upon the body; the river turned into blood, could not be drunk; the first-born of men and beast died; and a rod thrown on the ground was changed into a hissing envenomed serpent. In all this there could be no trick nor collusion. No power but the divine could put out the sun, or awake the thunder; could arm insects with mischief, and the lightning with death; could afflict men, in their persons, and in all their comforts, could change the helpful staff into the envenomed serpent; or removing these calamities at his pleasure, render men easy in their minds, and safe in their circumstances. Realize Egypt at this awful crisis; think of the judgements which came upon them, in a gradual succession, and each more formidable than the other, let it be particularly marked, that Goshen, where the Israelites resided, was perfectly exempted from every plague. Dark in Egypt, it was light in Goshen. The Egyptians were sick and dying; not one sickly among the Isra-

elites, nor in any danger : when fire and hail, when insects of various kinds were destructive to the master, the slave, free from destruction, dwelt in safety. Having such a view, could you have hesitated one moment? Was not the hand of God evidently distinguishable? Was not Moses the servant of the most high? Did he not act under a divine commission.

These operations were new, and Pharaoh was willing to ascertain their nature; he called in his magicians to his assistance. Their character and pretensions are not well known. Jannes and Jambres are named by the apostle, as withstanding Moses. Pliny, the natural historian, mentions the former of these in conjunction with Moses; and Numenius, the philosopher, mentions both of them, in the same conjunction, as celebrated magicians. In several miracles they were successful. They produced frogs; turned the water into blood, and their rods into serpents. It is evident from the scripture, that the worshippers of idols were the worshippers of devils. The power of these fallen spirits, is certainly great, It was now exerted to the utmost. The magicians knew not whether their attempt would succeed. Whatever their enchantments were, the effect was doubtful. They made the attempt where they failed, as well as where they succeeded. The contest was between the power of fallen spirits and the divine power. The issue might have been expected.

The divine power was gloriously triumphant, The other's under controul, was checked in the beginning of its success, and could prevail for mischief only. The magicians could avert none of the judgments introduced by Moses; and as soon as they were unsuccessful, they dropped any further attempt, acknowledging the finger of God; after this Pharaoh no more sought their assistance; the point was decided. The miracles of Moses were done by the Almighty, and bore the seal of heaven to the commission of his servant. If persons on the spot, who knew the whole mystery of deceit, and had at stake interest and reputation, could Moses have been made out an impostor, were constrained to declare that God did by him works which exceeded the reach of human power, in league with fellow spirits, I cannot see how a different opinion can be entertained by even infidelity itself.

Could we fix our attention entirely to what the scriptures relate, and impress our minds with their credibility, we must often be astonished. Suppose a vast multitude on the banks of the Potowmack, their enemies press upon them with an armed force, which cannot be resisted. In this distress, imagine that the stream divides, the waters rise on each side, forming a wall, a path being left dry between, through which the multitude may pass. Passed over, they look back upon the enemy in

eager haste, pursuing through this unusual tract.—I see the waters on either hand break in, and drown the embattled hosts. Could you avoid ascribing all to the Almighty, and acknowledging that he distinguishes between the oppressor, and the oppressed? This is no imaginary scene. It was experienced soon after the Israelites left Egypt, to admit them to the wilderness, and again forty years having elapsed, that they might enter the land promised their fathers. The first instance has been greatly disguised both by Josephus the Jew, and writers from among the Gentiles, but the miracle is undoubted, and was well adapted to confirm the Israelites in their obedience to God. And to warn the surviving Egyptians that there was no contending with the most high. In this also they could not be deceived. The Israelites passed through the channel, they saw with their eyes, the waters on either hand. The spray fell upon them like a thick mist, which suggested to the apostle the idea of their being baptized unto Moses in the sea, on the opposite shore, when looking back, they found the enemy buried in the deep: imposition in this instance was impossible. It was evident to the senses of thousands. If their seeing, hearing, or feeling, could be credited, all was real; God had indeed appeared in their behalf, and manifested evidently his power and glory.



A mixed multitude, consisting of many thousands were not likely to subsist long in a wilderness, unimproved with food, with raiment or any necessary. Yet in this same wilderness, the vast multitude subsisted for forty years, without cultivating the ground, without commerce, without manufactories. In the ordinary course of things, it could not have been. It was one continued miracle. Their clothing and food were miraculously provided. They wanted nothing, and yet nothing came in the ordinary way. They were under an immediate divine conduct. The command of God denounced by Moses, and discovered in the motions of the wonderful cloud directed their journeyings, or encampments. He fed them from heaven, preserved them in vigor, and prevented their clothes from wearing out. These facts are as well attested, as any historical facts can be, and they gave an astonishing discovery of the power and goodness of God.

I shall not insist on many others of a like nature, it is enough to observe that these were most common in the establishment of the Jewish economy, although never altogether wanting. In Babylon a few miracles are on record, whereby the Jews were vindicated in the belief, and worship of the living and the true God. The preservation of the three children in the fiery furnace, and of Daniel in the li-

on's den; the punishment of Nebuchadnezzar, and his remarkable recovery, greatly tended to advance the honour of Jehovah's name, among the idolatrous nations. These facts were all well ascertained, done in the presence of a prodigious concourse of all ranks and characters, and had a great effect, procuring different decrees from the most haughty and idolatrous monarchs on earth, enjoining worship and obedience to the Most High.

As the Jewish dispensation was established by miracles, so was the Christian. The expected Messiah appearing, was pleased for three years, to take upon himself a public character. Every day he employed for the benefit of mankind. He relieved all who applied to him. He gave to the blind their sight, and to the deaf their hearing. His creative power restored to the high priest's servant the ear which Peter had smitten off; and to many their deficient members; he raised from the dead a widow's son at Naen, and his friend Lazarus at Bethany. The most inveterate lunacy and afflictive possession yielded to his command. He calmed the raging of the sea, and multiplied a few loaves, and fishes to satisfy an hungry concourse. He escaped from the enraged Nazarenes, they knew not how; and by a word, perhaps a commanding look, laid his enemies prostrate at his feet. These things were not done in private, nor were they

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feldom repeated. They were done in the most frequented places, and multiplied daily. His enemies did not, could not deny what was done, whatever construction their perverse minds put upon them, and his attendants in astonishment insisted, "when Christ cometh will he do more miracles than these, which this man hath done." Nicodemus acknowledged, "that no man can do these miracles which thou doest, except God be with him." And a man who had been born blind, but recovered his sight, declared before the Jewish Sanhedrim with great simplicity of heart, *Why, herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. Now, we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard, that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing. They answered and said unto him, thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out.*

Nay, my brethren, not only were these things done by our Lord himself, but his disciples were empowered by him to do the same things in his name, and this power continued with them for more than two hundred years. Among other extraordinary endowments, they were enabled instantaneously to speak the lan-

guage of any nation, as fluently as if they had been natives, and if I mistake not, a specimen of this power remains in the church, the New Testament having been written originally in Greek, by those who were native Jews, and had no opportunity of acquiring in the ordinary course of things, any acquaintance with a foreign language. I find a circumstance much insisted on by Mr. Addison, and which he considers, and very justly, as a striking miracle. I mean the fortitude, and perseverance with which the young, and the old; the feeble and the robust; the high and the low submitted to lingering, and severe tortures, when a renunciation of christianity, or, in some instances, silence only, would have prevented these severities, or immediately have interrupted them. Human nature could not have held out without uncommon assistance from above. This was frequently acknowledged; Stephen beheld his Saviour ready to receive his departing spirit, others have been strengthened by an angel. These facts were of such notoriety, that even enemies have not ventured to call them in question. They are a glorious attestation to our holy religion. The more they are examined, the more they must impress the mind.

Enemies have in different ways attempted to lessen their weight. They mention a miracle wrought by Vespasian, the emperor, who

touching the eyes of a blind man, restored him to sight; allowing this, which is not fully ascertained, God might hereby put honour on a man who, in conjunction with his son Titus, was appointed his instrument to punish the Jews. The philosopher Apollonius is often mentioned by the enemies of our holy religion, as a rival in doing miracles, to our Saviour. Producing such a rivalship, is a tacit acknowledgment that our Saviour did miracles, with respect to Apollonius: many things said to be done by him, are very ridiculous, and whatever he did, they are vouched by a weak and credulous person only, his servant Damis. But what are these, when compared to the miracles of our Saviour who, publicly, subjected to every degree of examination, did more miracles in three years, than Moses and all the prophets put together, and continued this power some ages with the church.

That some things may be imposed upon men as miracles which are not, is generally granted in scripture. Simon Magus, spoken of in my text, before Philip's arrival in Samaria, used sorcery, *But there was a certain man called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.*

In Philippi, as the apostles went to pray, As we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul being grieved, turned, and said to the spirit, I command thee, in the name of Jesus Christ, to come out of her. And he came out the same hour. And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the market-place unto the rulers.

It is evident that this girl was under an evil influence, and thereby enabled by her discoveries and actions, to astonish the people, but the power under which she acted, could not resist the command of the apostle, speaking in his master's name. The scripture expressly foretels, that, *That wicked shall be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs, and lying wonders. And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. But we are bound*

*As give thanks alway to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because he hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the spirit, and belief of the truth.*

Wonderful things may, according to these passages be done, and of a nature too that, were it possible they could deceive even the elect. The scripture ascribes these to evil spirits. They seek the shade, and confirm men in their forgetfulness of God, or in a depraved or corrupted conduct; they have always yielded to true miracles, which dispel these mists, and encourages regard for God, and purity in heart and life. In this world impositions of different kinds are practiced. These render no person of consideration sceptics, neither ought counterfeits in religion, to render them infidels. True miracles are done openly, in the face of the sun, to the conviction of our senses, and are wrought by persons of character and piety, to confirm men in the purest doctrines, and the most glorious hopes. False miracles are few and concealed; they avoid inspection, and reconcile men to their evil habits and practices. These are plain distinguishing rules; applied to the miracles of scripture, they discover their veracity. They are the attestation of heaven to our holy religion. Moses's miracles became the more conspicuous and uncontroverted, in consequence of opposition from Pharaoh's magicians; Philip's confirmation to the gospel, in consequence of Simon's

forgeries; the excellency and stability of the truth, in consequence of the errors and falsehoods which arise.

Our Saviour appeals to his miracles, in attestation of his character, and urges upon the Jews the unreasonableness of their unbelief, having such an evidence of his coming from God. "If I had not done among them the works which none other did, they had not had sin, but now have they both seen, and hated both me and my father." What God had done before the Israelites, is recapitulated as a new motive to obedience. *Know you that day, says Moses, for I speak not with your children which have not known, and which have not seen the chastisement of the Lord your God, his greatness, his mighty hand, and his stretched out arm, and his miracles, and his acts, which he did in the midst of Egypt, unto Pharaoh the king of Egypt, and unto his land; and what he did unto the army of Egypt, unto their horses, and to their chariots: how he made the waters of the Red Sea to overflow them as they pursued after you, and how the Lord hath destroyed them unto this day.*

It is not necessary that such miracles be continued; well authenticated, they have the same weight with remote ages, as with the present, assuring them that the dispensation which they attest, is from God. It is the unhappiness of mankind to be inconsiderate. The heart is naturally averse to divine truth.



Whatever invalidates it is listened unto, be it ever so trifling, even a contemptuous sneer, although overborne by the most weighty considerations. In no light does human nature appear so depraved, in no light can it appear more truly pitiable. Let us not yield to such a bias. Let us weigh the attestations given to our holy religion; let our eyes be directed to God to impress these upon our minds; let us reverence what we must admit proceeds from God, and take rules to which, in prophecies, and in miracles, the seal of heaven is affixed, as our guide in life, then our conviction shall be confirmed, and our path as the morning light shall shine more and more unto the perfect day.

Every step we have taken in the present discussion, gives us new reason to receive the scriptures as the word of God, and to reject with indignation, whatever is designed to asperse, or undervalue them, and I make no doubt, but an inclination to receive the word of God, and an aversion at what tends to asperse and undervalue them, will increase, if the considerations I have yet to propose, be well weighed.

## DISCOURSE VI.

THE MIRACLES ATTENDING OUR SAVI-  
OUR'S DEATH, CONSIDERED,

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MATTHEW xxvii. 54.

*Now when the centurion, and they that were with him watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.*

THE alarming events which are related in this chapter, or which may be collected from the other evangelists, who speak of our Saviour's crucifixion and death, made deep impression on the mind of the Roman officer commanding the guard at his execution. Those events and the impression which the spectators received from them, are brought into view, and appear in an effecting light in our text. *Now when the centurion, and they that were with him watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they*

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*fear'd greatly, saying, Truly this was the son of God.*

Discourſing from theſe words I propoſe, through divine aſſiſtance,

I. To explain the nature of the events to which our text has an immediate reſpect. And

II. To ſhew how the centurion and thoſe *that were with him watching Jeſus*, were affected by them.

Explaining the nature of the events to which our text has an immediate reſpect, it will be neceſſary to view them in order, that each may receive proper attention.

The firſt thing of which I take notice, is the darkneſs which overſpread the land for *three* hours. This darkneſs was very remarkable: It happened at full moon, when that body could not be interpoſed between our earth and the ſun, which is fully aſcertained to be the cauſe of eclipſes, and conſequently the appearance cannot be accounted for on any known principle, but muſt be conſidered as ſupernatural and miraculous.

No eclipſe can be total for ſo long a ſpace as three hours; nor can it, at the ſame inſtant, embrace the whole hemisphere in its ſhade, as the account we have in the evangelists, and

the testimony of some profane authors lead us to suppose happened in the case before us: all which considerations make the present appearance the more amazing, and oblige us in accounting for it, to have recourse to the immediate interposition and power of God. He who kindled the sun at first, and appointed him to rule the day, can easily extinguish his fires at pleasure, or withhold his cheering influence. The exertion of such power then was every way suitable to the transaction of that important day. It was a sign from heaven, after which the Jews had always been so anxious in proof of our Saviour's mission. It was a token of displeasure against the Jews for shutting their eyes to other evidences of this, which were fully convincing, and for allowing their blindness and malice to hurry them on to such dangerous lengths. It was also a lively emblem of the struggle which the Lord of nature now underwent with the powers of darkness, and of the bitterness of distress which overwhelmed his spirit.

The second thing of which I take notice, is "the earthquake." Of this my text makes particular mention, and the rending of the rocks, which was possibly a consequence of the earthquake; according to some, this shock was generally felt through the world: According to others, it was perceivable in Judea only, or in the places near where our Saviour

was put to death. Be this as it may, it was certainly attended with very terrible circumstances, agitating the ground to the very spot on which the temple stood, tearing the neighbouring rocks asunder in an alarming manner, and leaving in that opening a monument of this event to succeeding ages. An earthquake is one of the most dreadful *phenomena* of nature. Sometimes it indicates that God is at hand. *The sea saw it, and fled; Jordan was driven back. The mountains skipped like rams; and the little hills like lambs. What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fledest? Thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back? Ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams; and ye little hills like lambs? Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob.* At other times, it indicates the divine wrath, coming to relieve his servant from the oppression of his enemies; at God's appearance, *The earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth. There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it.* Of both the divine presence, and displeasure was this earthquake expressive. It pointed out the eminence of the sufferer, he was the son of God, and Saviour of the world. Much indignity had been done him. The very rocks and stones cry out against the madness, and impiety of men; and had it not been for his timely intercession, "Father, forgive them"

his enemies would, in all likelihood, have been immediately swallowed up and irrecoverably lost.

The third thing of which I take notice, is that “the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.” This veil was a hanging of the richest and strongest tapestry, which separated the holy from the most holy place: Being now the time of the evening sacrifice, and upon a solemn occasion, when the high priest, probably Caiaphas himself, was ministering at the golden altar, and burning incense, this veil was, by an invisible power, rent in two in the midst, from the top to the very bottom, whereby the sacred oracle was laid open to full view. This was an awful and significant sign, particularly suited to rouse the consciences of the Jews, and convince them that their persecution of Jesus unto death, was offensive unto God, who would now abolish Mosaic rites, and services, and open a passage for the Jew and the Gentile; for the Greek and Barbarian, who believe in him through the new and living way of obedience unto death, unto the holiest of all.

The fourth thing which deserves our attention, is that “having cried with a loud voice, he yielded up the ghost.” The voice is among the first things in a dying person that fails him, faltering so much, that the few broken sentences attempted to be uttered, are scarcely

intelligible ; but our Saviour, speaking as a man in full vigour and strength, discovered that he was not yet exhausted, but could have survived for a much longer time, the tortures of the cross. Yielding up the ghost while so much life remained, explains what he had formerly declared to his disciples, " No man taketh away my life from me ; I lay it down of myself." He withdrew from the body, and died by an act of his own, according to the power which he had received of his father ; he could have done so, the moment he was nailed to the cross, leaving an insensible corpse to the insults and cruelty of his enemies, but he endured his suffering as long as was necessary, with patience and resolution ; then he left the body in such a manner, and with so much dignity, as had not, in any former instance, nor can in any succeeding, be equalled. This circumstance, in a particular manner, affected the centurion, who, as another evangelist expressly informs us, when " he saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost," glorified God by the confession in our text. The loud voice which he uttered is very significant. It may be considered as the shout of a conqueror, now spoiling principalities and powers, and making a show of them openly on his cross, or the proclamation of a herald, pointing out to all the world, ' the prince of life, mighty to save.

The last thing I take notice of is, that "the graves were opened, and many bodies of saints which slept arose." It is likely that the tombs were opened by the earthquake, and whilst they continued unclosed, the dead bodies which were deposited, recovered life and came forth, to the astonishment of all those who saw, or were informed of this fact. It was an expressive event, particularly so at this time, discovering at once the resurrection of the body, and the connection which this has with the death and resurrection of our Saviour from the dead. The sun's withholding his light at mid-day, the earth's trembling; the rocks' rending; the veil of the temple torn by an invisible hand from the top to the bottom; our Saviour's evidently yielding up his life by an act of his own; the dead's coming out of their graves, are events well suited to command the attention and reach the heart: which brings us to the

II. General head, in which I proposed to shew how the "centurion, and those that were with him watching Jesus," were affected by these alarming events. It is said,

*First.* That "they feared greatly," were thrown into a panic, lest they should be lost in the darkness, or buried in the earthquake; lest that God, to whom vengeance belonged, should, in some very terrible manner, avenge



the quarrel of the Saviour, both against them, and the body of the Jewish nation in general. A guilty mind is conscious of amazement and distress, even when there is no apparent danger; but this becomes oppressive and overwhelming, when God appears in such dreadful majesty as he now discovered. These tormenting apprehensions were not peculiar to the soldiers who were on guard, but another evangelist makes it known that *all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.*

We may easily suppose that the crowd which was now together, was uncommonly great, considering how much the fame of Jesus was spread through Judea, and what vast multitudes were drawn to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast. That multitude, many of whom, in all likelihood, had lately joined in the tumultuous outcry, 'Crucify him, crucify him,' were now confounded with remorse, and laid deeply to heart what had happened; to which convictions we may reasonably ascribe a predisposition for the success which afterwards attended the apostles' ministrations. The terror into which they were now thrown, led them

*Second,* To confess 'Truly this was the son of God.' We find a like confession once, and again, made by those, who, during our Sa-

viour's personal ministry, were witnesses of the miraculous power which he possessed. Its meaning, considering the persons by whom it was made, cannot be supposed always to have been precise and determined. It however, evidently includes thus much, that the person spoken of was a dignified person, and of unblemished sanctity; was dear unto God, and had particular interest with him; was more than is found in human nature, and possessed distinguished excellencies. These, or some such ideas, are expressed in the confession before us.

The Sanhedrim condemn him for blasphemy, in asserting that he was the son of God; the multitude assent to the condemnation as just; but the tide is turned. They believe his pretensions to be well founded. Hereafter they expect to see him on the right hand of power, coming in the clouds of heaven.

The centurion and his soldiers, the distant spectator, and he who was near, Jew or Gentile, startled at the darkness, and the earthquake; at the extraordinary manner in which he died, and the other prodigies which followed; were necessitated to declare in spite of meanness and contempt, of calumny and reproach, of the shame of the cross, and the ignominy of death, that he was "a righteous person," whom the Jews had maliciously

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accused, whom Pilate had wrongfully condemned, whom they, with wicked mouths and cruel hands, had insulted and put to death. Heaven and earth, the living and the dead, declare his dignity, and put it out of doubt that he 'was the son of God, this confession was made in the

*Third place*, by the "Centurion, and those  
"that were with him watching Jesus."

It was a captain and his company; soldiers and Romans, warlike heroes and experienced veterans, whose intrepidity and courage armed their hearts against fear; whose familiarity with scenes of cruelty and death, hardened them against pity. They lately insulted a condemned prisoner, and increased, by cruel mockings, the agony of the cross: But their hearts now relent; their consciences severely smite them, and they yield to a conviction which was so well founded, that the person whom they had crucified was "The son of God."

But the conviction reaches further than among these soldiers: The whole multitude of spectators felt its force, and discovered the sadness of their hearts in their countenances, and by expressive actions. A conviction thus general, and so well founded, must have its weight with every thinking person; and in-

deed it was to be expected from such events as have already been explained, and it gives probability to what the Evangelists record. It may raise a moment's doubt, that we hear nothing of the relenting of the high priest, and of those who were the immediate persecutors of our Saviour, but this doubt will disappear when we remember that they had all along resisted the fullest conviction, and most undoubted evidence. It was therefore allowed in just judgment, that their hearts, like the heart of Pharaoh, should remain hardened and unrelenting: But this does not weaken evidence otherwise universal and unexceptionable.

We have now finished the observations by which we meant to illustrate this passage, and may learn from what has been said, how far the facts which have now been explained, and the impression which they made on spectators, ought to affect us.

These are the seal of heaven to the character of Jesus. They remove the reproach of the cross; they put honour upon his person; they enhance the value of his sufferings.

Whilst we follow our Saviour to Calvary, and contemplate the shame and ignominy; the pain and distress; the insult and cruelty with which he was overwhelmed; let us immediately recollect the darkness which prevailed at

mid-day, the quaking of the earth, the rend-  
 ing of the rocks, the veil of the temple torn  
 by an invisible hand, the uncommon manner  
 in which our Saviour died, and the dead arising  
 from their graves, and appearing unto many ;  
 and let the recollection of these things sink  
 into our hearts, for they testify that the Father  
 approved of the Saviour, and excepts of his  
 sufferings as the atonement for our guilt.  
 Let this, therefore, be the language of our  
 faith, ' We believe, heavenly father, in him  
 ' whom thou approvest, and receive him as  
 ' our Saviour! May we be accepted in the  
 ' beloved, and find in our own experience, the  
 ' sufficiency of his atonement, and the effi-  
 ' cacy of his grace! May we glory in his  
 ' cross, being crucified by it unto the world,  
 ' and having the world crucified unto us!  
 ' We yield ourselves up as his willing peo-  
 ' ple! Whether we live, may we live unto the  
 ' Lord : or whether we die, may we die unto the  
 ' Lord: whether we live, therefore, or die,  
 ' may we be the Lord's. Put thy law in  
 ' our minds, and write it in our hearts; be our  
 ' God, and may we be thy people! teach  
 ' us to know the greatest! and be merciful to  
 ' our unrighteousness—our sins and our ini-  
 ' quities, remember no more!'

DISCOURSE VII.

THE SCRIPTURE, AN ANCIENT AND GENUINE PRODUCTION.

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ACTS XV. 21.

*Moses, of old time, hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the Synagogues every Sabbath day.*

**I**N these words, the apostle James, in a council assembled at Jerusalem, to decide on some difficulties which had arisen in the church at Antioch, and were now under consideration, asserts that the Old Testament was generally known, the book itself having for a long time been in circulation, and the doctrines which it contained, strenuously inculcated, *Moses of old time, hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the Synagogue every sabbath day.*

The antiquity of the scriptures is evidently taught in these words, and the great pains which had been taken to transmit them uncorrupted through succeeding ages. The illustration of these things is what I am at this time, through Divine assistance, to attempt.

✕ Considering the scripture as the oldest book in the world, it demands in this view, the examination of the inquisitive, exclusively of its higher demands, as a divine revelation.— The Jewish religion has been of long standing and the Jews so confirmed in the belief of its divine origin, that no reproach nor suffering could root out this belief from their minds. Blended with other nations, when it was for their interest to forget their own customs and religion, they have adhered strictly to both. This is the more remarkable since, except christians, and christianity, it has happened to no other people nor religion. The support of the secular arm withdrawn, false religions have disappeared; but Judaism, and christianity, where Judaism is refined and perfected, have been introduced with such attestations of their proceeding from God, that neither change nor affliction have been able to shake this pillar on which they rest.

The Jews were a very obstinate, and incredulous people, without the strongest evidence of the divine authority of their law, they

would never have submitted to such a number of burdensome and painful rites, which separated them from all other people, and placed them in some instances, in a very ridiculous point of light. There was a settled opinion among them, and a constant tradition, that God had spoken to Moses, and had done by him in Egypt, and in the wilderness, what no man, unless authorised by God, could have done. This opinion and tradition gives the greatest credibility of which it is capable to the Mosaic history. The Greeks, from whom all nations derive their learning, allow that they had their letters from foreigners, which letters are the same as the Syriac or Hebrew. The ancient Attic laws also, whence the Roman were afterwards taken, owe their origin to the laws of Moses. Than these circumstances which are well authenticated by Grotius, nothing can more convincingly establish the great antiquity of the writings of Moses. The authorities from which Moses drew his history before his own time were good; and character, as a historian, since he neither conceals his own faults, nor attempts anything which could tend to aggrandize his family, stands very high. The tradition from Adam to Moses concerning the creation, and the subsequent events, passed through few, and these judicious, credible persons. Methuselah conversed a long time, both with Adam and Noah; Shem with Noah and Abraham; Isaac



with Abraham and Joseph; Abraham with Joseph and Moses. The information then from Adam to Moses passed through four persons only, who were pious and intelligent, who could not mistake the account, and were every way disposed to preserve it full, and unadulterated. Besides, as science of every kind originated from Egypt, and the eastern countries, and as Moses was deeply versed in all their knowledge, in this respect, were his inspiration out of view, he was well qualified for the task which he had undertaken. A little before his death Moses wrote his law; *And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished, then Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee.* By this law their ritual was regulated, and civil causes tried: It was the directory for their worship, and the guardian of all their privileges. It was necessary that a copy of it should be in the hands of their priests, and rulers, besides the one lodged in the ark. Their chief magistrate was obliged to have one copy written with his own hand to regulate him in the execution of his high office. Under the corrupt princes the divine law was much neglected. This had been the case previously to Jehosaphat's reign.

Yet the law was not lost. Numbers appointed by this good king, had the book of the law of the Lord with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people. The worship in Hezekiah's reign, was hereby conducted. His successors, Manasseh and Amon, were enemies to this law; but it was sought after by Josiah, and strictly obeyed. It was not lost during the captivity, for Ezra regulated the worship of the returning Jews according to this law. It included the whole books of Moses: recapitulating its contents, Nehemiah takes notice of the Creation, of Abraham's history, and of the departure of the Israelites from Egypt. Antiochus designed to destroy the law, but the exertions of Judas Maccabæus frustrated that design; copies of it has been multiplied. The Jews had it with them in Judea, and in their dispersions through every country, nor was it long after Antiochus's day, when the Greek version of it was procured to enrich the library of one of the Ptolemæes of Egypt.

The writings of Moses have been in the hands of the Jews, since the first; many interests were involved in preserving these undulterated; particularly as they contained their title to a possession in Canaan. Men are very anxious to have titles of this kind undoubted. All this anxiety was excited to prevent, in the books of which I speak, any

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alteration, or corruption; circumcision, in use from the earliest ages, and sacrifices of various kinds; the observance of the Sabbath and of different festivals; the law of inheritances, and the criminal law, owed either their origin or establishment to Moses. Is it possible that such things could have been imposed upon a people, had they been fictitious? Were these not standing proofs, that Moses did *once* live and legislate? And living and legislating, must not the evidence of his acting under divine authority have been very strong, which could overcome the most obstinate incredulity, and bend the neck of the most inflexible to a grievous yoke? This is a weighty consideration. It is forcibly urged against the Deists by Mr. Charles Leslie, in a little, but useful treatise, called his short and easy method with them. And, indeed, it is a consideration which an attentive person cannot get over. By great peculiarities have the Jews been distinguished ever since Moses's day, both in their own land, and when strangers in other countries. A reverence for Moses was transmitted from father to son. Contemporaries knew that he was commissioned from God, and the impression could never be worn out, even when it reflected most on their conduct and pretensions.

In the writings of Homer we have a good account of Heathen theology. These wri-

tings are *confessedly* the work of him whose name they bear, and allowed to be genuine and ancient writings. But is the authenticity of Homer any ways equal to the authenticity of Moses? Homer's writings were found by Lycurgus the Lacedemonian legislator, when he sailed into Asia, in detached pieces, handed down by tradition only fifty years at least after Homer's death. These pieces were preserved in this detached state under several titles, for the religious and political knowledge which they contained, until at last they were divided by Pisistratus at Athens into two poems. the Iliad, and the Odyssey. This edition was corrected under Alexander the Great, and afterwards further under one of the Ptolemyes, which last edition is now in the hands of the learned. Homer thus found, collected, and improved, is received as genuine. He would be thought a madman by whom this was questioned. Yet it has not any of the marks of authenticity which belong to the writings of Moses; he wrote these with his own hand, deposited them in the sanctuary, and left monuments of their truth, which are preserved through every age and seen among all nations. To refuse such evidence, is to be obstinately ignorant. That the Pentateuch was written by Moses is confirmed by the highest attestation of which the thing can admit.

The authenticity of Moses's writings being established, the authenticity of the rest will follow. The Jews were then in possession of methods to determine what came from God, and what was merely human. Joshua wrote the history of his own times, and probably the last chapter of Deuteronomy. The Psalms, prophecies, and histories of a private or public nature, were written occasionally, and being found genuine, were gradually received into the Canon. Ezra, after the captivity, began to collect them together, giving a correct edition of the scripture. He made great progress in this work, which was completed, some years after, probably by Malachi. The whole was divided into sections, and from this period read regularly in the Synagogues, until our Saviour's appearance, who allowed their authenticity.

The hints now thrown out, must go far in establishing any by whom they are considered in the belief that the Old Testament is a genuine, and an ancient book; I proceed to speak of the New.

It is the concurrent testimony of Jews and Gentiles, of friends and enemies, that Jesus Christ lived in Judea, in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, and suffered under Pontius Pilate. The account of his sufferings and death was transmitted to the emperor by the governor

of Judea, and was extant when Justin Martyr wrote, who appeals to it, in his apology for christianity, addressed to the Roman senate. Equally evident is it that this same Jesus after his death, was revered, was worshipped, was obeyed by multitudes who bore his name. Their history is interwoven with the history of the empire. Christians were found in the palace, and in the army, among the polite and the rude, the ignorant, and the well informed. Edicts were repeatedly issued against them, and strictly executed; yet they multiplied and handed down their religion, through every succeeding generation, until the time in which we live. The doctrines which Jesus taught, and which christians believed are contained in the New Testament. It is not certain at what time the books of the New Testament were collected into one volume. This we know that before the middle of the second century, these books were generally read in every christian society throughout the world, and were accounted a divine rule of faith and manners. Eusebius expressly affirms, in his Ecclesiastical history, that John gave his approbation to the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which discountenances the senseless jeer that Luke was received into the church by one vote only. The gospel had been in general circulation, and receiving the apostle John's approbation, he added his own as a supplement to the

rest. The other books of this volume were probably collected at the same time, and sanctioned by the same authority. Spurious productions early appeared. These are easily detected. The churches to whom the epistles were written preserved them with care, and communicated them to others: any difficulty arising, the truth was easily traced up to the source, when either the apostles's own writings, or evidence equally weighty, put the matter out of doubt: some of the epistles being questioned, after a minute investigation, their authenticity was ascertained, and they were universally received into the sacred Canon. The early ages of christianity had great opportunities of ascertaining whether the books of the New Testament were written by those who bear their names, and it was the opinion of those in these early ages, whether friends or enemies, that they were. Christians themselves acknowledged them as such. Neither Jews nor Gentiles raised any controversy on this subject, Julian who had apostatized from christianity, and became its embittered enemy, frankly confesses that Peter and Paul, Matthew, Mark, and Luke wrote the books read in christian assemblies under their name. Dr. Whitby has many quotations in proof of this, particularly Dr. Lardner. Those who are inquisitive after such information may consult these authors.

It was so ordered in the divine providence that the first ages could receive the truth of the gospel history, through few, and very venerable witnesses. John who conversed intimately with our Saviour, lived until the year 100. His disciple Polycarp, who conversed also with others of the apostles, lived till the year 167; **Irenæus**, the disciple of Polycarp, 'till the year 202. Upon his martyrdom Origin appeared and advocated christianity very successfully for fifty-two years. Paul, the famous hermit, retired a little before Origin's death, from the Decian persecution, and lived until the year 343, about which period the empire embraced the christian revelation. This is one channel through which our Saviour's history might be preserved unadulterated, and whence inquisitive persons might acquire the fullest satisfaction. Upon this, Mr. Addison lays great stress. It deserves an attentive regard, upon the fathers of the church, whose information was so good, we may, certainly for historical facts, entirely depend. It is their unanimous voice, that the scriptures of the New Testament as now received, were written by the persons who bear their names, and were appealed to, as divinely inspired writings.

*Irenæus*

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Some institutions also, originating from our Saviour's time, and still preserved in the church; such as the observance of the Lord's



day, the sacrament of baptism, and of the Lord's supper, give great credibility to the gospel history, and to the peculiar doctrines by which it is distinguished.

The only remaining enquiry is, have these writings, and institutions, been handed down unadulterated? Are they no ways corrupted nor changed? Can we receive them as genuine, and pure?

Some circumstances ought to have great weight in attending to these enquiries. The writings of Moses, when once received, could, in no material point be altered, since the original copy was sacredly preserved in the ark, to which an appeal might always be made, since many copies were in the hands of their magistrates and priests; since it was the tenure on which they held their lands, and the directory for their worship; since the Samaritans, the bitter enemies of the Jews, had among them copies of these writings, which they considered as sacred. The remembrance of a whole nation must have been first entirely obliterated; attachment to ancient practices removed; an indifference become universal to these titles, which secured them in their possessions, and connivance be found among inveterate enemies, before such corruptions could take place. Such things were impossible. The Jews in copying the sacred volume,

numbered the words and letters, as well as sentences. Reproving the Jews for many crimes, our Saviour never once blamed them for; corrupting the sacred text. They had made it void by their traditions, but the text remained in its original state, and was approved of on all occasions, by our Saviour, and by his apostles. As it was not corrupted *then* it could not *afterwards*, when copies thereof were multiplied, and in all hands, whether Christians, Heathens or Jews.

The writings of the New Testament have been guarded with equal care. They could never originally have been admitted, had not the facts which they relate, the doctrines which they inculcate, and the precepts which they prescribe, been consonant with the facts, the doctrines, and the precepts, related, inculcated and prescribed, by those who first spread the gospel; and when admitted, without an agreement of all the world; for the scriptures had soon a general circulation, these could not have been falsified. That Copyists have committed blunders, that errors have crept in through the press, is not, and cannot be denied. It could not have been otherwise, without a constant miracle. This was not necessary. These writings are as correct and pure, as any of equal standing, nay, much more so; mankind having every thing at stake, in these writings, have transmitted them from father

to son, with the utmost care. It would be accounted a petulance, very unworthy of an honest enquirer, to reject as spurious, the Ilead or the *Æneid*, because some errors have crept into the copies which are in our hands; the petulance is the more inexcusable, when the scriptures are in question, which are more exempt from such errors than these other writings, and come down to us with marks of the highest authenticity.

Had not the subject been of such importance, I should not have treated of it at such length, and indeed it might be illustrated in other ways, considering the use of reason in religion, and shewing how much a good life prepossesses a man in favour of the gospel, whilst a bad life inclines him to disbelieve it; but enough has been said to direct the serious enquirer, and we might speak for ever before others will be persuaded to open their eyes to the light which falls from every quarter on this subject.

I therefore dismiss the subject at present, testifying, from the fullest conviction, that these writings are indeed, the word of God, that they are the only safe guide through the darkness experienced in this world, that by them, afterwards we shall assuredly be judged, and according to their decision, shall either stand or fall.

DISCOURSE VIII.

THE USE OF REASON IN RELIGION.

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JOB xi. 12.

*For vain man would be wise, though man be born  
like a wild asses's colt.*

WE have in these words the situation of man naturally, as he comes into the world. "born like a wild asses' colt,"—and his arrogant pretensions, "vain man would be wise."—I shall attempt at present, through divine assistance, the illustrations of each of these particulars.

Man naturally, as he comes into the world, is likened in my text to the wild asses's colt. *Sottish* is this animal, and *stubborn*. Therein is it characteristical of human nature. What so helpless as the infant, furnished with eyes, hands and feet? It can neither distinguish one object from another, nor handle what is before it, nor walk. To the mind belongs

many eminent qualities. In infancy these lie dormant; there is no trace of reason. The future philosopher, or the future idiot is not at this period to be known. They are superior in nothing, to the lower orders of creation. In some respects they are their inferiors. The perfect use of any sense, or of any member is acquired in a very gradual manner. The improvement of the mind, is still more gradual. It is a long time before we attain any useful knowledge. Some, even after a long life, know very little. The most knowing, find that they know in part only. The present state, in reference to the future, rises little, even when eminently improved, above the state of infancy in reference to manhood. This has readily been confessed by all who have given the matter any degree of attention, whether they have enjoyed the direction of a divine revelation, or have been directed by natural religion only. Paul's sentiments on this subject are well known. Speaking of endowments which rendered the possessor in his day, celebrated and useful, he speaks of them as adapted to an infant state only, and ready soon to be laid aside, and forgotten. *Whether, says he, there be prophecies, they shall fail, whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophecy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.*

*When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see as through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.* Of those who were left to the dictates of natural religion, Socrates was the most penetrating, and moral, yet he frankly acknowledged on all occasions, that his knowledge, by no means deserved the name. It astonished him to hear that the oracle had pronounced him "the wisest of men." "It must be," said this distinguished man, "because I have found out that I know nothing."

Mankind thus helpless and ignorant in the infant state, and acquiring, even when most improved by religious and philosophical knowledge, comparatively very inconsiderable attainments, are too head-strong. It is but little they know, nor are they anxious after knowledge. Much time and pains have been thrown away on numbers. The darkness of their minds has been too gross to penetrate; and their dispositions too obdurate to receive any polish. When families or tribes, have long separated from the rest of mankind, they have generally sunk into a savage state, in which the man has been degraded into the animal, and the highly boasted gift of reason been hardly discernable. A general intercourse

with different nations preserves appearances. But even this is not sufficient. The united effort of the reason of nations celebrated as polite, has left men under the influence of the most absurd opinions and corrupt practices.

Bewildered as mankind are in their opinions, and degenerated in their practices, their pretensions are high and arrogant. "Vain man would be wise"—he ventures upon the most abstruse subjects—no guide is supposed necessary—he can guide his own steps—providence has put the matter to an issue. The Gentile world had originally a simple and distinct tradition, concerning the creation of the world, and the object of worship; what they saw of God's works; what they experienced of his providence, confirming that tradition ought to have rendered them devout, thankful, and obedient. Such the tendency of their advantages. And nothing prevented their operating thus, but man's vanity. He would not keep to the simple truth, but must blend it with his own inventions. One invention was introduced after another, until the truth was so entirely disguised that it could not be known. *Syphis*, a king of Egypt, near Abraham's time, first ventured on such bold practices. *Kings* and *philosophers*; in after ages, trod too exactly in his foot-steps, forming a monstrous fabrick; of which we have a sad picture in the Epistle to the Romans. The apostle speaks of the

Heathen world. *Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools; And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient: Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness: full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity, whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, (that they which commit such things are worthy of death,) not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.*

Whether mankind's advantages have been greater or less, the improvement of them through a vain imagination, has been neglected. The apostle Paul, beheld the working of this disposition in his own day. Folly was dignified with high sounding titles; still it was folly. Revelation no where discourages useful knowledge, whatever is for the convenience and happiness of man, either in this world or in the next, has its countenance, and approbation. But speculations which inflame men's pride, and corrupt their conduct are uni-



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 formly discountenanced as unfit for them, and of pernicious consequence. "Beware," says the apostle, "lest any man spoil you through philosophy, and vain deceit." Again, "Avoid profane, and vain babblings, and oppositions of *science, falsely so called.*" And again, "Neither give heed to fables, and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than Godly edifying." In such admonitions the scriptures by no means discourage any useful knowledge, more than physicians do, who guard against dangerous pretenders to their art. A philosophy which disguises the truth, and depraves the practice, but which has always been in too much repute, is certainly pernicious, incurring justly, that censure thrown upon it in the scripture.

Having stated these few facts which give a mortifying view of human nature; it will be necessary to find out, if possible, what is meant by "reason," which is so much spoken of, and opposed, by numbers, very improperly, to revelation. Reason is that intellectual principle which raises us above mere animal nature. It capacitates us for receiving valuable knowledge. It is our distinguishing characteristic. It advances us in the scale of being. We do not depreciate this principle, for it is our glory. Let its operations be natural, without any force or improper bias, and it will operate for our advantage.

I have considered reason as that capacity of the soul, whereby we receive knowledge. It has its particular sphere. The sun diffuses its heat and light to a certain length in space. At a certain point its influence ceases. The eye takes in a limited view: Beyond this vision cannot reach. The vibrations which produce sound, affect the air to a precise extent. Angels are capable of certain kinds of knowledge, and in a certain degree. This capacity is different in different orders; in all it is finite. Some things exceed their reach. To them, these are incomprehensible. Every thing has its bound, whether it be the material system, or intellectual capacity. It belongs to the divine mind only to be infinite in its capacities, and perfection.

This is so evident, that I need not attempt any illustration. The subject had not at all been introduced, were there not generally a very improper way of expressing ourselves, man conceiving so extravagantly of reason, as to place it on the throne of God, and to worship this deity of their own creation. It was a humour of the same kind in our first parents, who expected to deify themselves by disobedience. Let me here propose a few plain enquiries. There is no doubt but men have been in possession of reason from the first. Were ancient legislators, and philosophers indebted for their knowledge, whereby they be-

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came very useful and celebrated, to their own reasoning? By no means. They travelled from one country to another, collecting carefully, such tradition as had escaped the hand of time, and treasuring these in their minds, formed from that source, their systems of legislation, and of wisdom. What kind of religion originated from the speculations of men, who laying aside tradition, and every foreign assistance, depended wholly upon themselves? It was the most monstrous which can be imagined; the creature was mistaken for the Creator; a four footed beast for the object of worship; a creeping insect for the eternal mind. Has this principle an energy in our day which it had not in former days? I am not sensible that it has. Dignified with a proud title, it is not more "The Age of Reason" than other ages. "The Age of Revolutions," would have been a more characteristic title. Is the book which compliments so highly the age in which we live, a specimen of enlightened reason? It is such a specimen as effrontery, and ignorance of the subject can give. Whether this ignorance be pretended, or real, I shall not determine, but it is gross and lamentable. Having spoken of the Old Testament, the author introduces a new subject. "So much," says he, "for *the Bible*." I now proceed to the New Testament. Astonishing! Does he not know even the title of book with which he contends. "The

Bible" is the general name, including both the Old and the New Testament, and puts a mark of distinction on these writings. The author quibbles at the titles *Old* and *New Testament*; *greater* and *lesser* prophets. This quibble arises from want of information. These titles are not in the text, but mark out certain books: doing this, they answer the purpose of names, and no more; but the writings themselves are no more accountable for these names, than the writings of Homer for the names *Odyssey*, and *Iliad*, given them long after the author's death. The nineteenth psalm is celebrated as an original piece of deistical composition, although that psalm be written expressly to shew the excellency of revelation. The author ridicules the system of revelation by placing, perhaps, in a proper light, the inventions of men, who enjoy this revelation. This is neither candid nor just. We have nothing to do with the systems of men. Let us confine ourselves to our bibles. Doing this, a great part of his ridicule is lost. I would call no man master on earth; not even Calvin himself. To the law and to the prophets, I appeal. Had this been done, the book dignified with a proud title, had never appeared. It is contended that our Saviour did not mean to die, for his enemies could not have discovered the lurking places, to which he had retired, without the assistance of a treacherous disciple. This is intolerable. Is it not known that our

Saviour on every day of that week, on which he suffered, entered publicly the city of Jerusalem, with his disciples; walked through the streets, not in disguise, but attended with the shouts of multitudes, repaired to the temple, and taught with intrepidity, and freedom from morning to night? The book itself, which this presumptuous writer has sent forth, affords the best apology for such ignorance, of which the nature of the thing can admit; declaring, that the author had for some time declined having a bible in his possession, and could not, where he was, procure a copy. Is it reasonable to condemn, *unheard*? To decide, *without examining*? To take things for *granted*, which are absolutely *false*, and to found on them a system derogatory to the honour of our holy religion? If this be reason, I renounce it as unworthy of notice. Let the author I speak of, be its sole possessor, it can neither do him nor any body else, any material benefit.

Whatever revolutions have lately taken place, proceed not, I apprehend, merely from the principle of "reason." If they did, we should see an uniform system, wisely contrived, steadily prosecuted, and beautifully completed. Nothing of all this appears. These events have arisen from the impulse of the moment. The first causes of these, had not in view what afterwards took place, and the issue may be vastly different from what the present agents in

them propose. The fact is, the world is governed by an invisible agent, who uses men as his instruments, and presides over the wild tumult of passion and folly, to introduce his own designs, and perfect his own work.

It appears from these observations, that *reason* has not that absolute controul over either religious, or civil matters, which some men would assert. Secret springs, generally unobserved, produce effects which astonish the world. Although mankind be agents in what is going on, and nearly concerned, neither is the plan theirs, nor the completion of that plan. It is arrogant to assume to human effort, *that* in which they are merely instruments, and however brilliant, and even useful, would soon come to nought, were it not part of the divine plan, in governing the world.

We must recur then to our first observation, that reason is that principle, which capacitates mankind for receiving knowledge. This principle has been greatly perverted, both in *apostate angels*, and in *fallen man*. They see things in a false light; and from their mistaken apprehensions, they raise systems of a monstrous and ruinous kind. What the eye is to the body, reason is to the soul. If the eye be diseased, the body has no distinct vision. If reason be perverted, the soul is deceived by erroneous systems. It is gratifying

to the pride of mankind, to form splendid systems out of their vain speculations. Thus they thicken the darkness which already overclouds their minds. They ought to acquaint themselves with simple facts, and let these lead them to the truth. I have in the course of the present examination, mentioned a number of topics, whence a divine revelation may be argued. It is the business of reason to sift the matter thoroughly, and to see how far a divine revelation may be argued from these topics. Convinced that the claim is not vain, but that there are writings which proceed from God, then, reason will suggest the necessity and wisdom of yielding ourselves up to the direction which these afford, without a murmuring thought, or contentious word. The writings, whose divine authority I have attempted to vindicate, are introduced with a few plain facts, from these a system of religious and moral duties is deduced. These facts are first principles. Let their nature be well ascertained. They open the way for further discoveries. The foundation laid on a rock, the fabrick will resist the most threatenng, and violent storms.

In a divine revelation we may well expect some astonishing discoveries. All nature is involved in mystery. We penetrate very little into what falls under our observation in the heavens, on the earth, or through the sea. If

we reject every thing which exceeds our understanding, we must reject the existence of God, for we cannot conceive how any being could have existed from eternity, without any cause of its existence; we must reject the whole system of the universe, for we have no idea of the manner in which such a system was produced, was organized, or is preserved in its present state, the union of soul, of body, cannot be admitted, for we can neither apprehend the nature thereof, nor give an account of it. Let the same humour be indulged, the man will become not a *deist* only; but a *sceptic*; and even an *atheist*.

I can see nothing unreasonable in supposing that the God-head should be to a finite capacity incomprehensible. I cannot comprehend the human, and how can I the divine nature. The scripture asserts *one God*. In the God-head the scripture speaks of the *Father*, the *Son*, and the *Holy Ghost*. I receive this on the credit of scripture. I have found the scripture to be a divine revelation. I submit therefore to its instruction. A child must receive many things on the credit of the parent, a scholar on the credit of the teacher. Must I reject what exceeds my understanding, when *God* only is speaking? This ought rather to be a new motive to acquiesce. Infinite wisdom cannot deceive me. What is taught me, I may not know now, but I shall know *afterwards*. I see a light in



scripture; I follow whether it leads, without distrust. It shall lead to heaven. The same observations apply to the atonement which I have now made concerning the God head. The reasons for this wonderful dispensation, I cannot ascertain. I receive it as a part of divine revelation. It must be necessary. It gives me hope and refreshment. It invigorates the soul, and leads to a holy life; it mortifies me to the mortal life, and awakes in me immortality. I receive the doctrine as divine. It exceeds my comprehension now, but it shall be part of my entertainment afterwards to see it unfolded: until then I give myself up to divine direction. This I ought to do, as an erring and guilty creature; "not my will," is my daily language, "thine be done."

My text discovers the great cause why men reject the scripture. "They would be wise, although they be born as the wild asses' colts." Remediating this disease, the scripture requires, "If any man among you seemeth to be *wise* in this world, let him become a *fool* that he may be wise." Let overgrown conceits of his own wisdom be laid aside, that he may submit himself, in the most unreserved manner, to the divine direction. "Verily," said our Saviour to his disciples, "except ye be converted, and become as *little children*, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Little

children are wholly under the direction and authority of their parents, whom they believe, whom they obey; equal confidence, equal submission is due from creatures to the Creator, and they can never be either happy, or safe, whilst it is otherwise. On this principle is the general language of scripture, "who-soever exaleth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Persons of an humble disposition have great encouragements. "To this man will I look, "saith the Lord, even to him that is poor and of "a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." A different disposition incurs God's displeasure. He challenges it as his own prerogative to look on every one that is proud, and bring him low. He shall despise their image. The day of vengeance shall burn them up; it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

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## DISCOURSE IX.

A MORAL LIFE DISPOSETH A MAN TO RECEIVE, BUT AN IMMORAL, TO REJECT THE GOSPEL.

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JOHN vii. 16. 17.

*My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.  
If any man will do his will, he shall know of  
the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether  
I speak of myself.*

**I**N these words our Saviour addresses himself to the Jews. Nothing can be conceived more obstinate than their opposition, both to his person and doctrine. This opposition is here ascribed to their lives. Wicked themselves, they could not endure the holiness required in the doctrine, and exemplified in the character of Jesus Christ. Let them cease to do evil, that they may be open to conviction: and that the truth may break with irresistible evidence upon their minds. *My*

*doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.*

Discourfing from thefe words, I fhall endeavour, through divine affiftance, to illuftrate the import of doing the will of God, and to difcover how far fuch conduct difpofeth us for receiving the doctrine of Chrift, as divine.

The way of holinefs is fo plain, that the wayfaring man, though a fool, cannot err therein. Few are the rules of conduct, and eafy; level to every capacity; intelligible by every underftanding; he may run that readeth them. To one principle, to one word may the whole be reduced—"Love." He that loveth hath fulfilled the law. It is equally effectual whether God or Chrift, ourfelves or others be in queftion. Perfons of the beft capacity, and of the greateft refinement, know well, that there is not a more difficult thing than to arreft the operations of their own minds, and to determine accurately concerning them. Should I enquire of any now hearing me, Do you love God? or Chrift? yourfelves, or others? You would probably hesitate; the anfwer is connected with a number of conclufions which ought previously to be drawn. Let me fimplify the queftion, and enquire, Have you any reafon for the exercife of this affection? And is your conduct correft-

pendent? Your reply brings us directly to the point. You know there is reason for the exercise of this affection. By the mind, you rank higher than the beasts of the field, or the fowls of heaven; you are thus a-kin to angels. This is the choicest gift of God; it has been stamped with his own image. The body is adapted to our circumstances on earth, and furnished with such members, such senses, such capacities, as promote our convenience, and comfort. The peace of the mind, the welfare of the body, are the care of God. Both are considered in the constitution of this lower world; and there is a better world where the ills incident to this are fully remedied. When these circumstances are known, can any thing be imagined more natural than worship and service? Let men only be persuaded of their relation to God, and of the obligations under which, as individuals, as families, as larger societies, he has laid them; and that these obligations are multiplied every day, every hour, every instant, they must immediately perceive, that prayer and praise, reverence and obedience, love and confidence, in the closet, in the family, in the church, in the more private or public walks of life, are equally rational, pleasant, and indispensable. Were not men very inconsiderate, they would never forget God. Precepts for the performance of such duties as I have been stating, would hardly be requisite. To these you would naturally be impelled. If you be hun-

gry, need you be commanded to eat, or thirsty, to drink? If languid and weary, is it necessary to press you, by persuasions, and entreaties, by promises, and threatenings, to receive cordials, or to take rest? No. In such circumstances, such conduct is as necessary and natural, as it is to breathe; equally so, are all the duties of religion to the person who considers his obligations to God, both for existence, and for whatever renders existence a blessing.

Our relation to God, and the obligations under which he has laid us, are easily understood. They do not exceed the reach of the meanest capacity. Are we equally related, equally obligated to Jesus Christ? An answer to this cannot be given, without recollecting an æra in the history of mankind, mortifying in the highest degree, and pernicious. We are tossed about by furious passions, betrayed by violent appetites; we are subjected to vanity. From the mind, and from the body; from ourselves, and from others; from the state of things here, from what are apprehended shall be the state of things hereafter, originate, troublesome, constant, and various evils. It was not so from the first. Man was made upright; he was placed in the midst of delights. All within, all without, what he then enjoyed, what he knew he should afterwards enjoy, conspired to complete his happiness. Being in honour,

he abode not. He rebelled against the Creator; with a daring rashness he touched, he tasted the fruit which, on the severest penalties, was prohibited. Since that moment, man sides with fallen angels. Painful is the representation given of human nature by the apostle, but it is drawn from real life. He represents it to be "*earthly, sensual, and devilish.*"

The misery in which we were sunk, the ruin in which we were overwhelmed, excited the pity of Jesus; he undertook our deliverance. I think I hear him address his father, 'Let

the condemnatory sentence, which they have incurred, fall upon me; let thy sword awake against thy fellow; let it smite the shepherd; let my life be taken for their life, my blood for their blood; accept of my intercessions in their behalf; let them be renewed, let them be sanctified, let them be justified through the merit of my death, and the operations of my spirit; and be thou glorified in me, and I in them.'

The Father accepted of the Son's interposition. He invested him with the mediatorial office. Through his death, through his intercession, through his prevailing influence, men are rescued from ruin; are received into favour, are prepared for heaven. Let a man once be sensible of his guilty, miserable situation. Let him behold the Saviour's interposition, as warding off eternal destruction, and restoring the privileges which he had forfeited, he must, with the utmost ardour, recognize his

deliverer, and entrust with him his recovery. Believing in Christ, is particularly spoken of as the work, by which God is more immediately honoured. The stupidity, and ingratitude of hearing with indifference, of such a salvation, and such a Saviour, excites the apostles's indignation, who pronounces the doom, which a moment's reflection must discover to be unavoidable. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema <sup>Ma</sup>natha." Let him remain under the curse, and in his own person, feel what his disobedience incurs.

The love of God, and of Christ, instantly suggests the obligation under which we are laid to both, and the duties by which this obligation is best fulfilled. Self love is a principle distinct from either of the two I have mentioned. It has a precise object. The peace and welfare of the body and of the mind, are intended; of these self love is the guardian; it is aware of danger, and avoids it; it examines in what course safety may be expected, and determines to *that* course rather than any other. The vindictive, and intemperate act against its dictates. Both do violence to themselves; both feel that they are wretched. Than the principle I speak of, there is not a stronger in human nature. You have felt its influence. It has rendered you active, vigorous, and persevering. Placing in the



mind itself, such a guardian of our welfare, is an instance of the goodness of God. Surprising is it to me, that some should reduce all the principles of action to this one. The love of God, the love of Christ, the love of others, are all distinct principles from the love of ourselves. They are by no means discordant. The one secures our duty to God, the other our duty to Christ, the third, our duty to ourselves, the fourth, our duty one to another. Deficient in any of these principles, there is a defect in the character. When each is in exercise, the glory of God, and the happiness of our own nature, are fully established. The selfish seem to be the least honourable of all the principles of human action. Their operations, not interfering with the operations of higher principles, cannot be supposed displeasing to God; nay, he takes pleasure in our happiness, and in every thing whereby it is promoted. Prudent steps for this purpose, cannot be neglected without transgressing his positive command.

Our relation to our fellow men, may easily be understood. We spring from the same parent, and travel the same road; we are necessary to each other. All orders are useful in their place. The rich or poor, the strong or weak, the man of eminent or moderate abilities, may advance the common welfare. Let us once be established in this truth, and we will be in-

clined not only to respect even the meanest of our brethren, but also be roused to perform our part, in directing, relieving, and satisfying all with whom we have any connection. If we look into the scripture, we find that the friendly regard which mankind ought to shew to each other, and the friendly conduct in which they ought to abound, are enjoined by the authority of God, and obedience secured by prospects the most pleasant, or terrifying, as the injunction is observed, or neglected. The will of God cannot be performed, whilst any of the relative duties are overlooked; an exact attention to them is agreeable to God, and in the satisfaction it gives, carries its own reward.

Having now illustrated the import of doing the will of God, in as far as our duty to God, and Christ, ourselves and others, are in question, let us next endeavour to discover how such conduct disposes us to receive the doctrine of Christ, as divine.

Under one or the other of the following particulars, may the leading doctrines of Christ be arranged. The *depravity* of our *nature*, the *efficacy* of the *gospel*, and the *certainty* of a *future state* of rewards and punishments. Let any man seriously, and determinately set about performing the duties which he owes to God and Christ, himself and others, and the

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doctrines I have mentioned, will appear very evident; he will no more be able to doubt of them than he can doubt of what he sees, hears, and feels.

The depravity of human nature is strongly asserted; its origin is traced; its progress marked. This truth is interwoven with all the institutions of the Old Testament, and the doctrines of the New. On this truth, revelation rests. Shake this, you shake the chief pillar, and bring the whole superstructure to the ground. The character which Christ sustains as the prophet, priest, and king of his church, suppose that we are sadly depraved: if we be not depraved, what the scripture says of the new birth, is absolutely unintelligible. Of this as a fundamental doctrine, you ought to be fully persuaded. Know the plagues of your own hearts; see if they be not deceitful, and desperately wicked. But how are you most likely to gain satisfaction on this particular; attempt doing the will of God, in the extent I have shewn to be necessary. The attempt will unfold the lamentable truth. God, you will find, has the best claim upon your affection; Christ upon your trust. It is matter of expediency and interest, as well as duty, that the body be kept under, and the welfare of others be promoted. convinced of this, and determined to act upon the conviction, you will find it no easy matter

to put your determination in practice. Running well, hindrances occur. All that is commanded you are resolved to do; but *here* you fail, *there* you transgress; after the greatest progress in religion, there is reason to blush, and to be confounded. How is this to be accounted for otherwise than by that innate depravity spoken of in scripture? We are not what God originally made us; greatly are we corrupted; the case is not singular. What we experience is the experience of all who know themselves. It astonishes the confederate to hear others speaking the very language of their own hearts. The experience coincides, face answers not more exactly to face in a glass. Than this, a stronger internal proof of the truth of christianity, cannot be received. Let a man know the plagues of his own heart; let him be sensible of his perverseness; then let the scriptures introduce the christian sighing, groaning, struggling; "*I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not that I do. Now, if I do that I would not, it is no*

X more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members waring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Can any hear this language without surprize? Is it not the very language of your own hearts? Is it not a proof that the book where such language is found, proceeds from him who is well acquainted with the hearts and lives of the sons of men?

The efficacy of the gospel, meeting, opposing, overcoming the depravity of our nature, is a doctrine of great importance. It is plainly taught; it has fully been experienced. This efficacy the gospel exerts in three ways. It convinces us of our ruined, and perishing circumstances; it shews us the extent of our danger. Providing for our safety, it strengthens us to improve this provision.

In the conviction I speak of, there is a secret, though a powerful impulse; new views open; were a blind man on the brink of a precipice to receive his sight, he could not be more alarmed. The mind seems to exert her own powers; the deductions are all natural, easy, and plain. It is surprizing that our ruined cir-

cumstances, should for the first time, strike us so sensibly. Explicable is this on the doctrine only of scripture. The divine spirit is operating in this natural manner, convincing us of sin, dissolving the heart of stone, and laying us in the dust. At this moment all nature seems to avenge the Creator's quarrel against the guilty. The disobedient Adam is no more regaled with the verdure of Paradise. Thorns and thistles are the spontaneous growth; they are extirpated with labour. Water destroys a profane world; fire consumed the profligate Sodomites. The earth swallowed up the rebellious Cora, Dathan, Abiram, and their companions; with pestilence and the sword; the idolatrous and perverse Jews are cut off. Particularly in the life and death of the Son of God, is it not very evident that the guilty cannot escape; but there is an atonement for guilt; there is a regenerating influence to create a new the soul. In the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God, may the most irreligious, and immoral be washed, be sanctified and justified. But how may we expect to experience this efficacy of the gospel? By doing the will of God, as my text directs. Attempt this, persist in the attempt; God requires such an expression of your faith and obedience. The views I speak of shall open upon you; the energy I speak of shall be felt; the grace of the gospel shall refresh your souls. The women of Samaria, I acknow-

ledge when living in dissipation, Saul of Tarsus, when persecuting the church, the jailor at Philippi, when oppressing the saints, suddenly interrupted in their dangerous courses, became acquainted with the power and grace of the gospel, and are standing monuments of the divine mercy. But this is unusual, and it would be presumptuous to depend upon a similar interposition. In the road of duty, God usually meets with men. Inquire after this road, enter upon it, persevere therein; you shall not seek God in vain, you shall never find him a wilderness, nor a land of darkness. What a confirmation must this be to the gospel, when you not only hear of its efficacy, but also have experience thereof, when it has become the wisdom of God, and the power of God for your own salvation. Your own experience will sweetly accord with the experience of the apostle. *There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit. For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made us free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.*

The gospel is particularly distinguished for bringing life and immortality to light. This

is its peculiar honour. Were infidels to dictate in what manner this doctrine should be taught, they would probably fix upon the very method which the gospel has taken. A glorious personage was pleased to descend from the world of spirits; *he* was visible on earth; *he* appeared in human nature; *he* was mortified to this world; *he* kept the other world always in view, certain of future rest and glory; *he* laboured, *he* agonized, *he* died. In the separate state *he* became visible to his disciples; *he* conversed frequently, and in the most familiar manner with them; *five hundred* at once were favoured with his presence and conversation. In the view of numbers, after having given them the most abundant proof of his being alive, *he* ascended up to heaven, to receive the reigns of universal government. His followers were so impressed with what they knew and felt, that nothing could prevent them from serving their divine redeemer, confident of being happy in his presence, and blessed, through eternity. I cannot give you more certain directions for attaining to the same conviction which animated the disciples, than the direction in my text, "Do the will of God." Thus the film will fall from your eyes. Conversing with the father of your spirits, you will become conscious of his existence. Your soul's enlarging, and discovering a noble ambition, which no created thing can satisfy, you will find that immortality co-incides with



your own feelings, as well as with the assurances, and proofs which christianity affords. Of nothing, shall you be more certain. The apostle Paul speaks with great confidence. He expresses the feelings of all christians. *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. Years confirmed the experience of younger life; he goes off the stage with triumph, I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*

I shall conclude with a short address, first to *unbelievers*, and then to those who are not yet fully established in the faith.

Infidelity is very prevalent amongst us. This can easily be accounted for on the principles I have been attempting to establish. Iniquity greatly abounds; unwilling to forsake their evil ways, and dreading the denunciations of the gospel, lest there be more truth in them than they could wish, for the ease of their own minds, men cavil at this character in scripture, and at that institution: this expression

gives them offence, and that doctrine: one freedom is used with sacred things after another, until they suppose that they have persuaded themselves, and attempt to persuade others, that all is a cheat, a cunningly devised fable. The fact is, these cavils are founded either in ignorance, or misrepresentation. When examined, they are unsubstantial; they evaporate like smoke in the air. Surly dogs some times bark at the luminaries of heaven, and they may bark for ever, for their barking can neither tarnish these luminaries, nor effect their existence. Your attempts, O infidel, are equally ineffectual. Christianity is founded on a rock; nay, the rock of ages. If any be hearing me who incline to infidelity; were *the author* of the "Age of Reason" himself present, who not very modestly indeed, nor very delicately, has ventured, publicly, to cast abroad his poisonous arrows, for the destruction, if possible, of these principles, which have been the consolation of thousands of thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousands. I would speak a word to this author; I shall not upbraid you with the hard names you give the martyrs who have obtained general respect. I shall not say a sentence of the undistinguished censure you pass upon the ministers of religion. I ask you, have you considered the proofs in favour of christianity from *prophecy*, and *miracles*, from the *purity* of its doctrines, and the *efficacy* of its publication;

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from the agreement between our own experience, and the discoveries which it makes. If these subjects be new to you, and they appear to be so, you speak of what you know nothing of, and shew a strange disposition to render others as unhappy as yourself, depriving them of what is their staff, and consolation. You quarrel my friend, with christianity. The quarrel I suspect ought to be with yourself. Your heart, perhaps and life, is not right with God. You tremble at the thought of a future world, and would laugh it out of existence. Enter upon a new life; seek a new nature. The ground of your quarrel with christianity being now ended, you would see with new eyes, and confess that indeed it proceeds from God.

I shall next address myself to those who are not yet fully established in the faith. "Like a wave of the sea you are driven with the wind, and tossed. Now one doctrine pleases you; then another. You halt between a variety of opinions. At one time you bend to this denomination, at another time to that. The burden of your conversation and thoughts, is the advantage derived from belonging to the party to which you attach yourselves, and the errors and faults of all the rest. Let it be remembered, that difference in opinion is unavoidable in the present state. The politician, the merchant, the farmer, the mechanic, whilst they enter-

tain different, and peculiar opinions upon politics, merchandize, farming, and mechanifm, live in very good neighbourhood, why may not religious persons, who differ in opinion, live in unity together, as brethren? I would not have you fond of disputing upon the peculiarities of this or the other church. You may dispute for ever, and gain no advantage. Thefe disputes fupply the infidel with arms. To the church to which choice, or education, or providence has attached you, be steady, but avoid ferments of all kinds. Thefe open the mouths of infidels, and fhake the ftadfaftnefs of the weak. Leaving others to their own mafter, let it principally be your endeavour to have a confcience void of offence, toward God and toward man. Be diftinguifhed for your piety, for your purity, for your moderation. Whilft fome ufe the fcripture as a club to injure their neighbours, do you ufe it as a ftaff for your own ftay and confolation. Whilft many are zealous without knowledge, be you zealous to excel all the world in love, both to God, and to man. Thus may the weak be eftablifhed, and the ftrong advanced. Were men to give more attention to their hearts and lives, than to forms and words, it would be both to their own comfort, and to their honour of religion.

*I befeech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye prefernt your bodies a living facrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable*

*service. And be not conformed to this world:  
but be ye transformed by the renewing of your  
mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and  
acceptable, and perfect will of God.*

## DISCOURSE X.

AMERICA WARNED.\*

EZEKIEL xiv. 19, 20, 21.

*If I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out my fury upon it in blood, to cut off from it man and beast, though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter, they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness. For thus saith the Lord God, how much more when I send my four sore judgments upon Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast?*

**T**HAT God reigns, is every where insisted upon in scripture: with righteousness he judges the poor, and reproveth with equity. He smites the earth, with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he slays

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\* *Delivered on Wednesday, 24th October, 1793, being a Fast-day appointed by the Synod of Philadelphia.*

the wicked. His government proceeds on steady principles, he changeth not. Of this my text gives us the fullest assurances.

*If I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out my fury upon it in blood, to cut off from it man and beast, though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter, they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness. For thus saith the Lord God, how much more when I send my four sore judgments upon Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast?*

Discourfing from these words, I shall, thro' divine affiftance, *First*, Enquire what incurs the the judgments of God. *Second*, Examine the nature of those judgments fpecified in my text. *Third*, Shew how certainly they fall upon a people, when incurred. And *Fourth*, mention the best security againft them.

What incurs the judgments of God, is very evident. Certain characters are registered to condemnation. What has befallen other finners of equal notoriety, may be confidered as hanging over us. The crimes expofed to the judgments fspoken of in my text, may be claffed under three heads. The *irreligious*, the *difipated*, the *oppreffive*, are ever in the utmoft danger.

Irreligion is the root of all crimes, it consists in unworthy thoughts of God, and unworthy behaviour towards him. Adam did not believe that death would attend his disobedience. If God threatens, certainly he will not execute. Inconsiderate was his mind, and ungrateful, self-willed and perverse. Too exactly is the same image received by his sons, and transmitted through succeeding generations. Different circumstances may place it in different shades, but the likeness is striking. The Heathens were so befotted and foolish, as to change the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and to four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Purity in heart and life, was not so much thought of, as exactness in some external rites and ceremonies. The Jews had advantages which were denied the Heathen. Their dispositions however, were often the same. Their prophets, at times, indeed, had no reason to blame any neglect in the ritual proscribed by Moses. In this they were scrupulously precise. It was however all parade. They did not sanctify God in their hearts, nor did they honour him in their lives. There were times also when the ritual proscribed by Moses was overlooked. The homage due to the God of Israel only, was payed to idols. The name, the day, the ordinances of God were prophaned, and despised. It were well had this root of bitterness been extirpated after the introduction of christ.



tianity. Alas it has often sprung up to the detriment of mankind. I need not give you a detail of irreligion, as the disgrace of christian countries, and christian societies in every age. To the intelligent this is too well known. Let late years, and this country bare witness of the sad truth. The revolution which gave America her independence, affected her religious principles. The prejudices of former years were rejected ; what her ancestors accounted sacred, she threw off as trifling, perhaps pernicious. Reformation is commendable, but men seldom keep the medium. Discovering errors on one side, they hurry into errors on the other. If the fathers have handed down human inventions as religion, the children rejecting these inventions, have rejected religion itself. Infidelity has deep root in this country ; it is of luxuriant growth. The ignorance in which the youth are brought up, with whom no pains is taken to form them to manly, spiritual, solid principles, affords a dismal prospect. By some religion is contemned, by others something is substituted for religion, which cannot bear the test. The deriders of religion are very numerous ; they are countenanced by multitudes of prophane swearers, daring sabbath-breakers, of those who constantly neglect religious ordinances, of a public or private nature. And when some attention is paid to religion, promoting a party, quieting an uneasy mind, the impulse of the moment, suddenly felt, suddenly

removed, is the foundation on which their religion rests. It is a foundation of sand, which the floods shall sweep away. Few experience the refined, the heavenly, the divine principles which christianity inspires, founded on love to God and man; on obedience to Christ, and conformity to his example. Irreligion assumes disguises suitable to the age, and to the state of society. It appears in this country with a bold countenance. Like a flood, it has deluged the land. Men either keep God altogether out of view, or believe him to be such a one as themselves, but he will reprove them, and set their sins in order before their eyes.

The dissipated are a second class of people, who draw down divine judgments upon a nation, the Antedeluvian world was sunk in dissipation, and security, nothing was thought of but pleasing the eye, gratifying the taste, and making a show in life. *They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark; and the flood came and destroyed them all.* The lives men led in Lot's day, were the same. *Likewise also, was it in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded. But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.* Eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, buying, selling, building, planting, are ne-

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cessary in their place. The present life could not otherwise be maintained, nor could we otherwise enjoy such comfort as this world is calculated to afford. Excess in things of themselves good, may convert them into evil. This is particularly true of the things now mentioned. Let them engross the whole attention; let them be considered as our chief good; let them be sought after with insatiable desire; let them so entirely intoxicate the soul, as shall incapacitate us from attending to any other interest. *But they that will be rich, fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.* In Sodom were found pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness, neither did they strengthen the hands of the poor, and the needy. Men thus prostitute to the world what God had reserved for himself. They act in opposition to his will; they are declared to be in a state of enmity. From this crime America, I am afraid, cannot be vindicated. Since the revolution she has enjoyed uncommon prosperity. The industrious find it easy to live in independent, if not affluent circumstances. What are the consequences? Are Americans grateful to Providence? Are they frugal? Are they charitable? Let an answer be given from a neighbouring city. The seat of government, the centre of trade, the receptacle of wealth, once celebrated

for the purity of her manners, and simplicity in her style of living, what extravagance, what luxury, what folly, what vice, the disgrace of European countries, has not gained a footing there, and been suffered to tyrannize over arbitrary sway? How is the gold become dim? The most fine gold changed? Degeneracy of a peccant nature, has spread through the land. Africans scorning to lead frugal, industrious, temperate lives, which at once would promote their honour and happiness, have been infatuated by a speculating, unbounded spirit, ruinous to the soul, and fatal to society. *Shall I not visit for these things? saith the Lord: and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?*

The oppressive, as well as the irreligious, and dissipated, are in the utmost danger. Among other crimes fatal to man in Noah's day, it is expressly said that the earth was filled with violence. Before the ruin, in which Jerusalem was involved by the Roman army, much oppression and violence were found in her. Take, as an example of this, an interesting incident in our Saviour's life: to intimidate him from prosecuting his work, the Pharisees took an opportunity of addressing him. *The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee. And he said unto them, Go ye and tell that fox, behold I cast out devils,*

*and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Nevertheless, I must walk to-day and to-morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem; O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not. Happy for Americans that their liberties, civil and religious, are secured by the laws, and an energetic government. It is however, to be lamented, that oppressive conduct is not altogether unknown. In some states it is not easy to recover a just debt, in others, slaves are treated with a rigor unbecoming in the treatment of the children of the same parent, the purchase of the same blood, the candidates for the same immortality. Government, no doubt, have good reasons for prosecuting the war on the frontiers. Would to God these reasons no longer existed. War commonly includes blame on both sides. The apostle James was sensible of this. *From whence come wars, and fighting among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust and have not: ye kill and desire to have, and cannot obtain, ye fight and war, yet have not, because ye ask not.* The Indians in hopes of plunder, stain their hands in blood. The frontier settlers may not perhaps have purer views, nor be less guilty. Thus the guilt of a*

nation is increased, thus national judgments are incurred. I am naturally led,

II. To examine the nature of these judgments specified in my text. The sword is mentioned the first of the four judgments with which God corrects the nations. God challenges it as his peculiar prerogative. *I make peace and create evil.* If I, says God, in the same chapter, *bring a sword upon that land, and say, sword go through the land, so that I cut off man and beast from it.* The Heathen raged, says the psalmist, speaking of wars. *The kingdoms were moved, he uttered his voice, the earth melted.* The Israelites were environed by hostile nations, ready, on all occasions, to break in upon them, to do them mischief; it was enjoined by their religion, that their men repair thrice a-year to Jerusalem. Was not this leaving their lands exposed? Was it not inviting the incursions of their enemies? God himself removes this objection. *Thrice in the year shall all your men-children appear before the Lord God, the God of Israel; for I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the Lord thy God, thrice in the year.* God governs by a restraining and a directing power. He says to the sea, "Thus far shalt thou come, and no farther. Even the wrath of man praises him, and the remainder of wrath he restrains." This interference is of so wonderful a nature, that it is the subject of faith,

rather than of sense. God may act through the instrumentality of good or evil angels, of pious or wicked men. When the Sabæans, and Chaldeans, excited by the evil one, breaking in, plundered Job of all his substance, did he curse their free-booters, and give vent to his vexation in oaths, and execrations? No, Job was more devout. He observed the hand of a father in this stroke. "The Lord gave," says he, "and the Lord hath taken away." When Shimei insulted David, in his adversity, and cursed him, David restrained his servants from taking his life, saying, "So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, curse David." Politicians assign very plausible reasons for wars, and their different progress. Infidels acquiesce in these, and reject the interference of a divine government, but devout persons consider wars as the rod with which God corrects the nations, and brings about his own purposes. By this rod our country is scourged. Americans are too apt to think despicably of the Indians. I know not what they are in themselves; as instruments in the hand of providence, there is no calamity which they may not bring upon this country. I cannot help conceiving their power to be terrible. They have stained in different battles, the American arms. One, who had faced them in the field, speaks of being exposed to the cruelties of a savage foe, the most subtle, and I will take upon me to say, the most formidable of any people upon the face of God's

earth. We are not yet much affected by the wars in Europe; let us be thankful on this account. God has endued our chief magistrate with prudence to avoid this calamity; but let us repent, lest this also come upon us. Famine is the second of the four sore judgments which God sends upon a nation. Several famines are spoken of in scripture. For these natural causes could be assigned. If the Nile for instance, did not flow in Egypt, or the rains fall in Judea, at the proper seasons; if caterpillars, locusts, or other insects abounding, destroy the fruits and crops; if such weather occurs as occasions blasting, and milldew; is not the hand of God seen in these changes? This he would have men be sensible of. *Son of man when the land sinneth against me, by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it.*

Egypt, in the days of Joseph, a land less subject to this calamity, being more fertile than most others, was visited with famine for seven years. The same calamity fell upon Judea, and for the same space, during Ahab's reign. Famines are foretold, as a presage of the destruction which of Jerusalem. Americans may believe themselves safe from this calamity; let them not boast; it is in the store of the divine judgements; he can call for it



when he pleaseth to execute his vengeance. The Hessian fly, which did such mischief some years past, the blasting and mildew, of which farmers complain last year, may warn Americans, that their staff of bread is with God, who may break it whenever their crimes provoke this calamity. The prophet mentions the noisome beast as a third judgement, with which God corrects the nations. God promises Israel, *I will send hornets before thee which shall drive out the Hivite, the Cannanite, and the Hittite, from before thee.* The hornet is bigger than the wasp, and of the same species. It is exceedingly fierce; its sting occasions fevers. It aims particularly against the eye. Joshua ascribes his victory over the Amorites to these insects, who darting against the enemy, made them so blind, that they could not see to fight. *And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out before you, even the two kings of the Amorites, but not with thy sword, nor with thy bow.* God sent among the Egyptians, divers sorts of flies, which devoured them, and frogs which destroyed them. If the most contemptible creatures may be used for the punishment of a nation, may not also the more formidable. When the prophet cursed the profane children in the name of the Lord, as they went to Bethel, there came forth two she-bears out of the wood, and tore forty and two of them. This happened by divine direction, and was

an immediate judgment from God. It is expressly said in this chapter by God himself. *I cause noisome beasts to pass through the land, and spoil it, so that it be desolate, that no man may pass through for sake of the beasts.* Inconsiderate people, when incommoded by insects, or otherwise, think nothing of God. The devout observe the hand of God, in all that befalls them.

The last judgment mentioned by the prophet, whereby God punishes a guilty nation, is the pestilence. It is much easier to give a history of the pestilence, than to investigate whence it proceeds, and how it is communicated. It is highly epidemical; it may pass from land to land in goods, or clothes. This we may know with sufficient certainty, that when God is pleased with a nation, he takes sickness away from the midst of it, when displeased he sends the pestilence to cut off from it man and beast. A pestilence destroyed Sennacherib's army, wasted Judea towards the conclusion of David's reign, carried off the first born of Egypt. In all these cases the instrumentality of an angel, is mentioned. The psalmist speaks of *the pestilence which walketh in darkness*, evidently meaning that the causes of this disorder cannot be ascertained. They elude the most diligent search: in the same psalm the pestilence is compared to a fowler's snare. Its venom catches men

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as insensibly, and suddenly, as the snare doth the bird when it is laid with much cunning. During the Peloponnesian war, a dreadful plague carried off, in one year, an infinite number of the Athenians. The year in which it began was of all others, the most healthy, and free from diseases. The Athenians believed themselves punished for some acts of sacrilege, of which they had been guilty. Thucydides acknowledges that he could not account for its introduction.

One of Cassius's soldiers having found at Babylon, under ground, a small golden coffer; opening it, such pestilential vapours arose, as infected all who were present, spread through the army, desolated the provinces wherever they marched, and was attended with great mortality, to the remotest parts of the empire. A plague raged in Constantine's reign, with fury for three years, in Sicily, Greece, the islands of the Ægean sea, and Constantino-ple, that the living could scarcely bury the dead. In the reign of Micipsa of Numidia, a great part of Africa was covered with locusts which destroyed the produce of the earth, and even wood, driven away by a strong wind into the African sea, out of which being in vast heaps, a plague arose which did unspeakable mischief. It raged in the city of Ittica, in such a degree, that 1500 dead bodies were carried out of one gate in a year. Of the

plauge which raged in London in the year 1665, we have very circumstantial accounts. It had been imported through Holland, from the Levant; it desolated the family in which it broke out; it spread through the neighbourhood. Appearances alarmed the city. The bills of mortality in a week, were between 240 and 300, though they increased in a short time to 474. A severe frost in January, continuing several weeks, the disorder abated, and the apprehensions of the citizens ceased. In May it broke out anew with increasing violence; all who could, left the city. Ferments arising from religious differences subsided; the inns of court were shut up; no contention about worldly interests; all were at peace. The people crowded the churches with uncommon ardor. By the month of August, a thousand died in a day. In September, 1600 were dying one day with another. People were almost driven to despair. The contagion despised all medicine. At this moment, when hope was gone, and the city nearly depopulated, the disease instantly stopped. The physicians were astonished. All their patients were well. The contagion no more appeared. The most irreligious could not help acknowledging that this was the hand of God.

Our country has not been subject to this desolating calamity. It has, however, fallen

upon us. The destroying angel has received the commission; he has unsheathed his sword; he spreads destruction. Our brethren in Philadelphia deserve our sympathy. Multitudes have been cut off; multitudes are in danger; multitudes are alarmed. Their minds are much affected. Take for example, a letter I lately received from my friend Doctor Rush. I had informed him of our intentions this day. "Many thanks," says he, "to you, for your proposed fast day for our distressed city. The disease, whose ravages you mean to deprecate, still prevails. Never before did I witness such deep, and universal distress. Continue fervently to pray for our citizens, and for none oftener than your sincere friend." Such are the judgments with which God visits a guilty nation. Sometimes one is sent; some times another; some times the whole appear in dreadful array. I come now,

III. To show how certainly these judgments fall on a people, when incurred. There is a remarkable passage in the book of Genesis. God promised to Abraham the possession of Canaan, and mentioned as a reason that the promise was not immediately performed. "The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." There were many pious people; Melchizedec for instance, Mamre, Ethcol, and others, who, as fast preserved the

land from degeneracy. The land was not ripe for destruction. There is a certain height in wickedness, at which, when a nation arrives, they can no longer be forborne. Then no intercessions on their behalf can be of any avail. The decree is passed. In the punishment there can be no delay, no abatement. The old world was so entirely abandoned, that in Noah's family alone could any goodness be found. Frequently, no doubt, did this pious patriarch bewail the state of mankind, and pray for their reformation. But the fatal moment arrived; the destruction of mankind was inevitable. Abraham interceeds for the cities of the plain, and his intercessions had prevailed for their deliverance, had ten righteous persons been found amongst them. The degeneracy was so deep, so universal, that even this number of that character could not be found among all the multitudes, with which these cities abounded.

When Canaan was punished by the sword of Joshua, Rahab was the only pious person in the whole country. Jerusalem was daringly wicked when the Roman armies executed upon it the divine judgments. A little before the day of judgment, wickedness, we have reason to think, shall attain an atrocity unknown on earth before. Let the wickedness of a city, a country, an empire, become universal and atrocious, were the persons whose

prayers availed much for their cotemporaries present, interceding for a people thus circumstanced, it could not be effectual. *Though Nahab, Daniel, and Job, were there, as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness.* Nay, let them not pray then; the accepted time is escaped, and the day of salvation. With him they must be left, who has said "vengeance is mine, I will repay."

After examining *what incurs* the divine judgments; the *nature* of those judgments specified in my text, and the *certainty* of their falling upon a people when incurred, I am prepared in the

IV Place, to mention the best security of individuals against these judgments. What crimes incur the divine judgments? Are the irreligious, the dissipated, the oppressive, the troublers of the land? Do they provoke the Lord to anger? Do they draw down vengeance on a people? If you be of a different character; if you sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; if you be mortified to the world; if you do to others as you would that they should do to you; in so far you discountenance the crimes for which God pleads against a nation, and may expect either exemption from the judgments which are incurred, or some advantage, should these reach you. The

Lord knoweth how to deliver the Godly out of temptation. The righteous shall save their souls alive. A thousand may fall at their side, ten thousand at their right hand, but the destruction shall not come near unto them. Noah escapes from the destruction of the old world; Lot from the destruction of Sodom; Rahab is not lost in Jericho, nor the christians in Jerusalem. God distinguishes between the righteous and the wicked. I say not, that the righteous are always safe in national calamities: No—one event is common to them with the wicked. But particular care is taken of them. The fire which consumes the wicked, refines the righteous. It is for their advantage, they shall live; if better things be intended them, they shall be removed to regions of peace. A father chastens the one, a judge punishes the other. We see a little way, therefore cannot decide positively, on what is doing in our world; but we have reason to believe it shall be well with the righteous. To them godliness is great gain. If they be long continued on earth, men shall be benefited by their example and prayers; if they be taken to heaven, they shall experience fullness of joy, and pleasures for evermore.

Having finished the observations I intended for the illustration of this passage, I shall conclude with an address to persons of different characters.



It is very evident that national guilt draws down national calamities. This guilt may arise, not only from such public acts as are oppressive, and such laws as are unjust; but when the manners and lives of individuals are notoriously corrupted, hereby national guilt is contracted and accumulated. The idle and the dissipated, the profane swearer, and daring sabbath-breaker; he who neglects religion, and he who makes it the subject of his derision, trouble society, and expose it to divine vengeance. Upon you, in some measure, may be charged the blood which drenches the frontier settlements; the pestilence which lays waste a neighbouring city; the mischief done during some years by the Hessian fly; during the last year by blasting and mildew. Societies, smaller and larger, are made up of individuals. Let each individual reform, and reformation in the society, be it ever so extensive, will soon be apparent. It may be objected, had we any concern in the guilt we should feel the punishment, we also should languish, and bleed, and die. Those whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices, or those who were crushed under the tower of Siloam were not, as our Saviour assures, more atrocious sinners than their brethren. Examples are necessary for the warning of others. We may not be innocent, although at present we

may be safe. If our guilt individually accumulates the national guilt, justice to the sufferers as well as sympathy, requires that each examine his own heart and life; that he confess and forsake his sins; that he fear God and keep his commandments. Public judgments are intended to bring men to the acknowledgment of a Divine Providence, to the reverence and practice of a devout, and religious life. Unless you do this, you fail in a material instance in your duty to society, and like Achan in the camp of Israel, bring shame, disappointment, and ruin upon the nation. Society resembles the human body. If one member suffers the whole suffers with it. Should we be so inattentive and perverse, as to learn no wisdom from the distress in which our brethren, at a distance, are involved, distress may approach near and fall upon our neighbours, our families, our own persons. For God's sake my brethren, for the sake of society, for your own sakes, let all sincerely and resolutely confess and forsake their sins, that the prosperity of this country may not be blasted in the bud. This is a favorite country: It has enjoyed the smiles of heaven: It is an asylum to the afflicted, through the earth. In proportion to our happiness is our ingratitude, if we act unworthily of that happiness. Shall the ox know his owner, and the ass his master's crib, and Americans not know God? Americans not acknowledge his providence! Waxing fat,

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shall they kick, forgetting the God that made them, and lightly esteeming the work of their salvation! To us indeed, belong shame and confusion of face. Let the remembrance lay us in the dust, and fill us with humility and contrition of spirit.

However far we may have gone astray, there is every thing to encourage our penitence and reformation. Ezekiel beheld a mark set upon those who bewailed the guilt which drew down upon Judea heavy judgments. Regard was paid to their persons, and to their prayers. Had there been ten righteous persons in the cities of the plain, they had not been destroyed. For the elect's sake, the judgments which fell upon Jerusalem, were much mitigated. In this respect, the righteous are better than their neighbours. They are the salt which preserves society from ruin. Let each seek God by fasting and prayer. It may avail much, both for effecting the reformation of America, and suspending the judgments which hang over it. Some kinds of calamities, as our Saviour assures us, can be removed by prayer and fasting only. Esther found this very effectual for dissipating a dark cloud which threatened her nation. The Ninivites hereby prevented the destruction of their city. When Daniel besought God for the captives at Babylon, by fasting and prayer, whilst he was yet speaking, the command for

their deliverance went forth from Cyrus. There is hope wherever a spirit of grace and supplication is found. I am persuaded there are many in this land who fear God. Let them with one heart, and one voice, bewail the national guilt, under which this country groans. Let them deprecate the judgments which are now amongst us. Let them discover a greater love for one another, a greater attention to God as a Spirit, worshipping him in spirit and in truth. Let them herewith prove him whether he will not pour out upon them a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it; whether he will not rebuke the devourer for their sakes. "All nations shall call America blessed; for ye shall be a delightful land, saith the Lord of hosts."

*F I N I S.*

## ERRATA.

Page.	Line.		
4	22	Theme	read them.
—	26	Burmuda	Bermuda.
9	10	The simple,	omit <i>the</i> .
18	2	Majus,	Magus.
—	9	Relentness,	relenting.
22	15	Omit the.	
25	1	As	is.
23	21	Is III. the	is the III.
32	24	And be,	and the laugh be.
35	20	Cafe,	éafe.
37	11	And it	and how it.
40	6	Eat,	ate.
42	17	Ever,	even.
43	6	If,	had.
—	19	Preceeding,	preceding.
50	4	Blends,	blinds.
51	21	Levels,	cavils.
55	8	Every,	any.
56	13	Examplary,	exemplary.
59	12	Existance,	existence.
62	15	Thrown,	throne.
63	31	Epelogue, Polico.	Eclogue Pollio.
64	11	Paradifical,	Paradisiacal.
66	15	Unashamed,	ashamed.
—	23	Ideas,	jest.
68	6	From Philip,	for Philip.
72	13	18 Mistery,	follow, myltery fallen.
74	3	14 Unimproved	denounced, un- provided, announced.

- 80 13 Encourages, encourage.  
94 26 Know the greatest, Know thee.  
97 23 And character, and his character.  
98 1 for Abraham read Amram.  
99 23 Ptolemyes, read Ptolemies,  
104 4 Are, read were,  
105 8 Ironicus, read Irencœus.  
107 23 Copyjests, read Copiests.  
129 11 Maunatha, read Maranatha.  
135 82 Women, read woman.  
141 27 The hearts, read their hearts.

X