

SERMONS

BY THE

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WITH A

FUNERAL SERMON BY THE REV. SAMUEL FINLEY, D. D.,

HIS SUCCESSOR IN THAT OFFICE,

AND SOME ACCOUNT OF PRESIDENT DAVIES, BY THE REV. THOMAS

GIBBONS, D. D., OF LONDON, AND THE REV. DAVID

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CONTAINING ALSO

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BY THE

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SERMONS ON IMPORTANT SUBJECTS.

SERMON I.

THE DIVINE AUTHORITY AND SUFFICIENCY OF THE' CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

LUKE xvi. 27-31: *Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldst send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*

WHAT Micah said superstitiously, when he was robbed of his idols, Ye have taken away my gods; and what have I more? (Judg. xviii. 24) may be truly spoken with regard to the religion of Jesus. If that be taken from us, what have we more? If the foundations be destroyed, what shall the righteous do? Ps. xi. 3. The generality of you owe all your hopes of a glorious immortality to this heaven-born religion, and you make it the rule of your faith and practice; confident that in so doing you please God.

But what if after all you should be mistaken? What if the religion of Jesus should be an imposture?—I know you are struck with horror at the thought, and perhaps, alarmed at my making so shocking a supposition. But this suspicion, horrid as it is, has probably been suggested to you at times by infernal agency; this suspicion may at times have arisen in your minds in their wanton and licentious excursions, or from the false alarms of a melancholy and timorous imagination: and if this suspicion has never been raised in you by the sophistical conversation of loose wits and affected rationalists, it has been owing to your happy retirement from the polite world, where infidelity makes extensive conquests, under the specious name of Deism. Since therefore you are subject to an assault from such a suspicion, when you may not be armed ready to repel it, let me this day start it from its ambush, that I may try the force of a few arguments upon it, and furnish you with weapons to conquer it.

Let me also tell you, that that faith in the Christian religion which proceeds from insufficient or bad principles, is but little better than infidelity. If you believe the Christian religion to be divine, because you hardly care whether it be

true or false, being utterly unconcerned about religion in any shape, and therefore never examining the matter; if you believe it true, because you have been educated in it; because your parents or ministers have told you so; or because it is the religion of your country; if these are the only grounds of your faith, it is not such a faith as constitutes you true Christians; for upon the very same grounds you would have been Mahometans in Turkey, disciples of Confucius in China, or worshippers of the Devil among the Indians, if it had been your unhappy lot to be born in those countries; for a Mahometan, or a Chinese, or an Indian, can assign these grounds for his faith. Surely, I need not tell you, that the grounds of a mistaken belief in an imposture, are not a sufficient foundation for a saving faith in divine revelation. I am afraid there are many such implicit believers among us, who are in the right only by chance: and these lie a prey to every temptation, and may be turned out of the way of truth by every wind of doctrine. It is therefore necessary to teach them the grounds of the Christian religion, both to prevent their seduction, and to give them a rational and well-grounded faith, instead of that which is only blind and accidental.

Nay, such of us as have the clearest conviction of this important truth, have need to have it inculcated upon us, that we may be more and more impressed with it; for the influence of Christianity upon our hearts and lives will be proportioned to the realizing, affecting persuasion of its truth and certainty in our understandings.

If I can prove that Christianity answers all the ends of a religion from God; if I can prove that it is attended with sufficient attestation; if I can prove that no sufficient objections can be offered against it; and that men have no reason at all to desire another; but that if this proves ineffectual for their reformation and salvation, there is no ground to hope that any other would prove successful; I say, if I can prove these things, then the point in debate is carried, and we must all embrace the religion of Jesus as certainly true. These things are asserted or implied in my text, with respect to the Scriptures then extant, Moses and the prophets.

My text is a parabolic dialogue between Abraham and one of his wretched posterity, once rioting in the luxuries of high life, but now tormented in infernal flames.

We read of his brethren in his father's house. Among these probably his estate was divided upon his decease; from whence we may infer that he had no children: for had he had any, it would have been more natural to represent him as solicitous for their reformation by a messenger from the dead, than for that of his brothers. He seems, therefore, like some of our unhappy modern rakes, just to have come to his estate, and to have abandoned himself to such a course of

debaucheries as soon shattered his constitution, and brought him down to the grave, and alas! to hell, in the bloom of life, when they were far from his thoughts. May this be a warning to all of his age and circumstances!

Whether, from some remaining affection to his brethren, or (which is more likely) from a fear that they who had shared with him in sin would increase his torment, should they descend to him in the infernal prison, he is solicitous that Lazarus might be sent as an apostle from the dead to warn them. His petition is to this purpose: "Since no request in my own favour can be granted; since I cannot obtain the poor favour of a drop of water to cool my flaming tongue, let me at least make one request in behalf of those that are as yet in the land of hope, and not beyond the reach of mercy. In my father's house I have five brethren, gay, thoughtless, young creatures, who are now rioting in those riches I was forced to leave; who interred my mouldering corpse in state, little apprehensive of the doom of my immortal part; who are now treading the same enchanting paths of pleasure I walked in: and will, unless reclaimed, soon descend, like me, thoughtless and unprepared, into these doleful regions: I therefore pray, that thou wouldest send Lazarus to alarm them in their wild career, with an account of my dreadful doom, and inform them of the reality and importance of everlasting happiness and misery, that they may reform, and so avoid this place of torment, whence I can never escape."

Abraham's answer may be thus paraphrased: "If thy brothers perish, it will not be for want of means; they enjoy the sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament, written by Moses and the prophets; and these are sufficient to inform them of the necessary truths to regulate their practice, and particularly to warn them of everlasting punishment! Let them therefore hear and regard, study and obey, those writings: for they need no further means for their salvation."

To this the wretched creature replies, "Nay, father Abraham, these means will not avail; I enjoyed them all; and yet here I am, a lost soul; and I am afraid they will have as little effect upon them as they had upon me. These means are common and familiar, and therefore disregarded. But if one arose from the dead, if an apostle from the invisible world was sent to them, to declare as an eye-witness the great things he has seen, surely they would repent. The novelty and terror of the apparition would alarm them. Their senses would be struck with so unusual a messenger, and they would be convinced of the reality of eternal things; therefore I must renew my request; send Lazarus to them in all the pomp of heavenly splendour; Lazarus whom they once knew in so abject a condition, and whom they will therefore the more regard, when they see him appear in all his present glory."

Thus the miserable creature pleads, (and it is natural for us to wish for other means, when those we have enjoyed are ineffectual, though it should be through our own neglect;) but, alas! he pleads in vain.

Abraham continues inexorable, and gives a very good reason for his denial: “If they pay no regard to the writings of Moses and the prophets, the standing revelation God has left in his church, it would be to no purpose to give them another: they would not be persuaded though one rose from the dead; the same disposition that renders them deaf to such messengers as Moses and the prophets, would also render them impersuadable by a messenger from the dead. Such an one might strike them with a panic, but it would soon be over, and then they would return to their usual round of pleasures; they would presently think the apparition was but the creature of their own imagination, or some unaccountable illusion of their senses. If one arose from the dead, he could but declare the same things substantially with Moses and the prophets; and he could not speak with greater authority, or give better credentials than they; and therefore they who are not benefited by these standing means must be given up as desperate; and God, for very good reasons, will not multiply new revelations to them.”

This answer of Abraham was exemplified when another Lazarus was raised from the dead in the very sight of the Jews, and Christ burst the bands of death, and gave them incontestable evidences of his resurrection; and yet after all they were not persuaded, but persisted in invincible infidelity.

This parable was spoken before any part of the New Testament was written, and added to the sacred canon; and if it might be then asserted, that the standing revelation of God’s will was sufficient, and that it was needless to demand farther, then much more may it be asserted now, when the canon of the Scriptures is completed, and we have received so much additional light from the New Testament. We have not only Moses and the prophets, but we have also Christ, who is a messenger from the dead, and his apostles; and therefore, surely, “if we do not hear them, neither will we be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” The Gospel is the last effort of the grace of God with a guilty world; and if this has no effect upon us, our disease is incurable that refuses to be healed.

I cannot insist upon all the important truths contained in this copious text, but only design,

I. To show the sufficiency of the standing revelation of God’s will in the Scriptures, to bring men to repentance; and,

II. To expose the vanity and unreasonableness of the objections against this revelation, and of demanding another.

I. I am to show the sufficiency of the standing revelation in the Scriptures to bring men to repentance.

If the Scriptures give us sufficient instructions in matters of faith, and sufficient directions in matters of practice, if they are attended with sufficient evidences for our faith, and produce sufficient excitements to influence our practice, then they contain a sufficient revelation; for it is for these purposes we need a revelation, and a revelation that answers these purposes has the directest tendency to make us truly religious, and bring us to a happy immortality. But that the revelation in the Scriptures, (particularly in the New Testament, which I shall more immediately consider as being the immediate foundation of Christianity) is sufficient for all these purposes, will be evident from an induction of particulars.

1. The Scriptures give us sufficient instructions what we should believe, or are a sufficient rule of faith.

Religion cannot subsist without right notions of God and divine things; and entire ignorance or mistakes in its fundamental articles must be destructive of its nature; and therefore a divine revelation must be a collection of rays of light, a system of divine knowledge; and such we find the Christian revelation to be, as contained in the sacred writings.

In the Scriptures we find the faint discoveries of natural reason illustrated, its uncertain conjectures determined, and its mistakes corrected; so that Christianity includes natural religion in the greatest perfection. But it does not rest here; it brings to light things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, 1 Cor. ii. 9—things, which our feeble reason could never have discovered without the help of a supernatural revelation; and which yet are of the utmost importance for us to know.

In the Scriptures we have the clearest and most majestic account of the nature and perfections of the Deity, and of his being the Creator, Ruler, and Benefactor of the universe; to whom therefore all reasonable beings are under infinite obligations.

In the Scriptures we have an account of the present state of human nature, as degenerate, and a more rational and easy account of its apostacy, than could ever be given by the light of nature.

In the Scriptures too (which wound but to cure) we have the welcome account of a method of recovery from the ruins of our apostacy, through the mediation of the Son of God; there we have the assurance, which we could find no where else, that God is reconcilable, and willing to pardon penitents upon the account of the obedience and sufferings of Christ. There all our anxious inquiries, Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings? &c., Micah vi. 6, 7, are sat-

isfactorily answered; and there the agonizing conscience can obtain relief, which might have sought it in vain among all the other religions in the world.

In the Scriptures also, eternity and the invisible worlds are laid open to our view; and “life and immortality are brought to light by the Gospel;” about which the heathen sages, after all their inquiries, laboured under uneasy suspicions. There we are assured of the state of future rewards and punishments, according to our conduct in this state of probation; and the nature, perfection, and duration of the happiness and misery, are described with as much accuracy as are necessary to engage us to seek the one and shun the other.

I particularize these doctrines of Christianity as a specimen, or as so many general heads, to which many others may be reduced; not intending a complete enumeration, which would lead me far beyond the bounds of one sermon; and for which my whole life is not sufficient. I therefore proceed to add,

2. The Holy Scriptures give us complete directions in matters of practice, or a sufficient rule of life. A divine revelation must not be calculated merely to amuse us, and gratify our curiosity with sublime and refined notions and speculations, but adapted to direct and regulate our practice, and render us better as well as wiser.

Accordingly, the sacred writings give us a complete system of practical religion and morality. There, not only all the duties of natural religion are inculcated, but several important duties, as love to our enemies, humility, &c., are clearly discovered, which the feeble light of reason in the heathen moralists did either not perceive at all, or but very faintly. In short, there we are informed of our duties towards God, towards our neighbours, and towards ourselves. The Scriptures are full of particular injunctions and directions to particular duties, lest we should not be sagacious enough to infer them from general rules; and sometimes all these duties are summed up in some short maxim, or general rule; which we may easily remember, and always carry about with us. Such a noble summary is that which Christ has given us of the whole moral law; “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, &c., and thy neighbour as thyself.” Or that all-comprehending rule of our conduct towards one another, “Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye the same unto them.”

What recommends these doctrinal instructions and practical directions is, that they are plain and obvious to common sense. It is as much the concern of the illiterate and vulgar to be religious, as of the few endowed with an exalted and philosophic genius; and consequently, whatever difficulties may be in a revelation to exercise the latter, yet all necessary matters of faith and practice must be delivered in a plain manner, level to the capacities of the former; oth-

erwise it would be no revelation at all to them who stand in most need of it. Accordingly the religion of Jesus, though it has mysteries equal and infinitely superior to the largest capacity, yet in its necessary articles is intelligible to all ranks who apply themselves with proper diligence to the perusal of them; and I dare affirm, that a man of common sense, with the assistance of the sacred Scriptures, can form a better system of religion and morality than the wisest philosopher, with all his abilities and learning, can form without this help. This I dare affirm, because it has been put to trial, and attested by matter of fact; for whoever is acquainted with the writings of the ancient heathen philosophers, cannot but be convinced, that amidst all their learning and study, amidst all their shining thoughts and refined speculations, they had not such just notions of God and his perfections, of the most acceptable way of worshipping him, of the duties of morality, and of a future state, as any common Christian among us has learned from the Scriptures, without any uncommon natural parts, without extensive learning, and without such painful study and close application as the heathen moralists were forced to use to make their less perfect discoveries. In this sense the least in the kingdom of heaven, i.e., any common Christian, is greater than all the Socrateses, the Platos, the Ciceros, and the Senecas of antiquity; as one that is of a weak sight can see more clearly by the help of daylight, than the clearest eye can without it.

And by whom was this vast treasure of knowledge laid up to enrich the world? by whom were these matchless writings composed, which furnish us with a system of religion and morality so much more plain, so much more perfect, than all the famous sages of antiquity could frame? Why, to our astonishment, they were composed by a company of fishermen, or persons not much superior; by persons generally without any liberal education; persons who had not devoted their lives to intellectual improvement; persons of no extraordinary natural parts, and who had not travelled, like the ancient philosophers, to gather up fragments of knowledge in different countries, but who lived in Judea, a country where learning was but little cultivated, in comparison of Greece and Rome. These were the most accomplished teachers of mankind that ever appeared in the world. And can this be accounted for, without acknowledging their inspiration from heaven? If human reason could have made such discoveries, surely it would have made them by those in whom it was improved to the greatest perfection, and not by a company of ignorant mechanics.

The persons themselves declare that they had not made these discoveries, but were taught them immediately from heaven, (which indeed we must have believed, though they had not told us so.) Now we must believe their declaration, and own them inspired, or fall into this absurdity. That a company of illiterate,

wicked, and daring impostors, who were hardy enough to pretend themselves commissioned and inspired from God, have furnished us with an incomparably more excellent system of religion and virtue, than could be furnished by all the wisest and best of the sons of men beside; and he that can believe this may believe any thing; and should never more pretend that he cannot believe the Christian religion upon the account of the difficulties that attend it. I have touched but superficially upon the sufficiency of the Scriptures as a rule of faith and practice; for to dwell long upon this, would be to fight without an antagonist. Our infidels reject the Christian religion, because they suppose it requires them to believe and practise too much, rather than too little. Hence they are for lopping off a great part of its doctrines and precepts, as superfluities, or encumbrances, and forming a meagre skeleton of natural religion. Their intellectual pride will not stoop to believe doctrines which they cannot comprehend; and they cannot bear such narrow bounds as the precepts of Christianity fix for them in their pursuits of pleasure, and therefore they would break these bands asunder. That which they affect most to complain of, is the want of evidence to convince them of the truth of this ungrateful religion; it will therefore be necessary to prove more largely, that,

3. The Scriptures are attended with sufficient evidences of their truth and divinity.

It is certain that as God can accept no other worship than rational from reasonable creatures, he cannot require us to believe a revelation to be divine without sufficient reason; and therefore, when he gives us a revelation, he will attest it with such evidences as will be a sufficient foundation of our belief.

Accordingly the Scriptures are attested with all the evidences intrinsic and extrinsic, which we can reasonably desire, and with all the evidences the nature of the thing will admit.

As for intrinsic evidences, many might be mentioned; but I must at present confine myself in proper limits. I shall resume the one I have already hinted at, namely, that the religion of the Bible has the directest tendency to promote true piety and solid virtue in the world; it is such a religion as becomes a God to reveal; such a religion as we might expect from him, in case he instituted any; a religion intended and adapted to regulate self-love, and to diffuse the love of God and man through the world, the only generous principles and vigorous springs of a suitable conduct towards God, towards one another, and towards ourselves; a religion productive of every humane, social, and divine virtue, and directly calculated to banish all sin out of the world; to transform impiety into devotion; injustice and oppression into equity and universal benevolence; and sensuality into sobriety: a religion infinitely preferable to any that has been con-

trived by the wisest and best of mortals. And whence do you think could this god-like religion proceed? Does not its nature prove its origin divine? Does it not evidently bear the lineaments of its heavenly Parent? Can you once imagine that such a pure, such a holy, such a perfect system, could be the contrivance of wicked, infernal spirits, of selfish, artful priests, or politicians, or of a parcel of daring impostors, or wild enthusiasts? Could these contrive a religion so contrary to their inclination, so destructive of their interest, and so directly conducing to promote the cause they abhor? If you can believe this, you may also believe that light is the product of darkness, virtue of vice, good of evil, &c. If such beings as these had contrived a religion, it would have borne the same appearance in the Bible as it does in Italy or Spain, where it is degenerated into a mere trade for the benefit of tyrannical and voracious priests; or it would have been such a religion as that of Mahomet, allowing its subjects to propagate it with the sword, that they might enrich themselves with the plunder of conquered nations; and indulging them in the gratification of their lusts, particularly in polygamy, or the unbounded enjoyment of women. This religion, I fear, would suit the taste of our licentious freethinkers much better than the holy religion of Jesus. Or if we should suppose Christianity to be the contrivance of visionary enthusiasts, then it would not be that rational system which it is, but a huddle of fanatical reveries and ridiculous whims. If, then, it could not be the contrivance of such authors as these, to whom shall we ascribe it? It must have had some author; for it could not come into being without a cause, no more than the system of the universe. Will you then ascribe it to good men? But these men were either inspired from heaven, or they were not; if they were not, then they could not be good men, but most audacious liars; for they plainly declared, they were divinely inspired, and stood in it to the last; which no good man would do if such a declaration was false. If they were inspired from heaven, then the point is gained; then Christianity is a religion from God; for to receive a religion from persons divinely inspired, and to receive it from God, is the same thing.

Another intrinsic evidence is that of prophecy.

Those future events which are contingent, or which shall be accomplished by causes that do not now exist or appear, cannot be certainly foreknown or foretold by man, as we find by our own experience. Such objects fall within the compass of Omniscience only; and therefore when short-sighted mortals are enabled to predict such events many years, and even ages before they happen, it is a certain evidence that they are let into the secrets of heaven, and that God communicates to them a knowledge which cannot be acquired by the most sagacious human mind; and this is an evidence that the persons thus divinely taught are the messengers of God, to declare his will to the world.

Now there are numberless instances of such prophecies in the sacred writings. Thus a prophet foretold the destruction of Jeroboam's altar by the good Josiah, many ages before, 1 Kings xiii. 2. Cyrus was foretold by name as the restorer of the Jews from Babylon, to rebuild their temple and city, about a hundred years before he was born, Isaiah xlv. 1, &c. Several of the prophets foretold the destruction of various kingdoms in a very punctual manner, as of Jerusalem, Babylon, Egypt, Ninevah, &c., which prediction was exactly fulfilled. But the most remarkable prophecies of the Old Testament are those relating to the Messiah; which are so numerous and full, that they might serve for materials for his history; they fix the time of his coming, viz., while the sceptre continued in Judah, Gen. xlix. 10, while the second temple was yet standing, Hag. ii. 7, Mal. iii. 1, and towards the close of Daniel's seventy weeks of years, i.e., four hundred and ninety years from the rebuilding of Jerusalem, Dan. ix. 24, &c. These prophecies also describe the lineage of the Messiah, the manner of his conception, his life and miracles, his death, and the various circumstances of it; his resurrection, ascension, and advancement to universal empire, and the spread of the gospel through the world. In the New Testament also we meet with sundry remarkable prophecies. There Christ foretells his own death, and the manner of it, and his triumphant resurrection; there, with surprising accuracy, he predicts the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. We find various prophecies also in the apostolic epistles, particularly that of St. Paul, Rom. xi., concerning the conversion of the Jews; which, though it be not yet accomplished, yet we see a remarkable providence making way for it, in keeping the Jews, who are scattered over all the earth, distinct from all other nations for about one thousand seven hundred years, though they are hated of all nations, and consequently under the strongest temptation to coalesce with, and lose themselves among them; and though all other nations have in a much shorter time mixed in such a manner, that none of them can now trace their own original; e.g., who can now distinguish the posterity of the ancient Romans from the Goths and Vandals, and others that broke in upon their empire and settled among them; or of the ancient Angli from the Danes, &c., that mingled with them?

These and many other plain predictions are interspersed through the Scriptures, and prove their original to be from the Father of lights, who alone knows all his works from the beginning, and who declares such distant contingent futurities from ancient times. Isaiah xlv. 21.

I might, as another intrinsic evidence of the truth of Christianity, mention its glorious energy on the minds of men, in convincing them of sin, easing their consciences, inspiring them with unspeakable joy, subduing their lusts, and

transforming them into its own likeness; which is attested by the daily experience of every true Christian. Every one that believeth hath this witness in himself: and this is an evidence level to the meanest capacity, which may be soon lost in the course of sublime reasoning. But as the deists declare, alas! with too much truth, that the gospel hath no such power upon them, it is not to my purpose to insist upon it.

I therefore proceed to mention some of the extrinsic evidences of the religion of Jesus, particularly the miracles with which it was confirmed, and its early propagation through the world.

Miracles of this case are events above or contrary to the established law of nature, done with a professed design to attest a revelation; and as they are obvious and striking to the senses of the most ignorant and unthinking, they are the most popular and convictive evidences, adapted to the generality of mankind, who are incapable of a long train of argumentation, or of perceiving the origin of a religion from its nature and tendency.

Now the religion of Jesus is abundantly attested with this kind of evidence. The history of the life of Jesus and his apostles is one continued series of miracles. Sight was restored to the blind, the deaf were enabled to hear, the lame to walk, the maimed furnished with new-created limbs, the sick healed, the rage of winds and seas controlled, yea, the dead were raised; and all this with an air of sovereignty, such as became a God; the apostles were also endowed with miraculous powers, enabled to speak with tongues, and to communicate the Holy Spirit to others. These miracles were done not in a corner, but in the most public places, before numerous spectators, friends and foes: and the persons that wrought them appealed to them as the evidences of their divine mission: and the account of them is conveyed down to us by the best medium, written tradition, in a history that bears all the evidences of credibility, of which any composition of that kind is capable.

Another extrinsic evidence of the truth of Christianity is its extensive propagation through the world in the most unpromising circumstances.

The only religion, besides the Christian, which has had any very considerable spread in the world, is that of Mahomet; but we may easily account for this, without supposing it divine, from its nature, as indulging the lusts of men; and especially from the manner of its propagation, not by the force of evidence, but by the force of arms. But the circumstances of the propagation of Christianity were quite otherwise, whether we consider its contrariety to the corruptions, prejudices, and interests of men; the easiness of detecting it, had it been false; the violent opposition it met with from all the powers of the earth; the instruments of its propagation; or the measures they took for that purpose.

Christianity is directly contrary to the corruptions, prejudices, and interests of mankind. It grants no indulgence to the corrupt propensities of a degenerate world; but requires that universal holiness of heart and life which, as we find by daily observation, is so ungrateful to them, and which is the principal reason that the religion of Jesus meets with so much contempt and opposition in every age.

When Christianity was first propagated, all nations had been educated in some other religion; the Jews were attached to Moses, and the Gentiles to their various systems of heathenism, and were all of them very zealous for their own religion; but Christianity proposed a new scheme, and could not take place without antiquating or exploding all other religions; and therefore it was contrary to the inveterate prejudices of all mankind, and could never have been so generally received, if it had not brought with it the most evident credentials; especially considering that some of its doctrines were such as seemed to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; particularly that one of obscure birth and low life, who was publicly executed as a slave and malefactor, should be worshipped and honoured as God, upon pain of everlasting damnation; and that there should be a resurrection of the dead: the last of which was an object of ridicule to all the wits and philosophers of the heathen world. Again, as some religion or other was established in all nations, there were many, like Demetrius and his craftsmen, whose temporal livings and interest depended upon the continuance of their religion; and if that was changed, they fell into poverty and disgrace. There was a powerful party in every nation, and they would exert themselves to prevent the spread of an innovation so dangerous to their interest, which we find by all histories of those times they actually did: —and yet the despised religion of Jesus triumphed over all their opposition, and maintained its credit in spite of all their endeavours to detect it as an imposture; and this proves it was not an imposture; for,

In the next place, it was easy to have detected Christianity as an imposture, nay, it was impossible it should not have been detected, if it had been such; for the great facts upon which the evidence of it rested, were said to be obvious and public, done before thousands and in all countries; for wherever the apostles travelled they carried their miraculous powers along with them. Thousands must know whether Christ had fed many thousands with provisions only sufficient for a few; whether Lazarus was raised from the dead before the admiring multitude; whether the apostles spoke with tongues to those various nations among whom they endeavoured to propagate their religion, (as indeed they must have done, otherwise they would not have been understood.) These things, and many others, upon which the evidence of Christianity depends, were public

in their own nature; and therefore, if they had not been matters of fact, the cheat must have been unavoidably detected, especially when so many were concerned to detect it.

Farther: Christianity met with the most strenuous opposition from all the powers of the earth. The Jewish rulers and most of the populace were implacable enemies; and as they lived on the spot where its miraculous attestations were said to be given, it was in their power to crush it in its birth, and never have suffered it to spread farther, had it not been attended with invincible evidence. All the power of the Roman empire was also exerted for its extirpation; and its propagators and disciples could expect no profit or pleasure by it, but were assured, from the posture of affairs, from daily experience, and from the predictions of their Master, that they should meet with shame, persecution, and death itself, in its most tremendous shapes; and in the next world they could expect nothing, even according to their own doctrine, but everlasting damnation, if they were wilful impostors; and yet, in spite of all these discouragements, they courageously persisted in their testimony to the last, though they might have secured their lives, and helped their fortune (as Judas did) by retracting it; nay, their testimony prevailed, in defiance of all opposition; multitudes in all nations then known embraced the faith; though they expected tortures and death for it; and in a few centuries, the vast and mighty Roman empire submitted to the religion of a crucified Jesus. And who were those mighty heroes that thus triumphed over the world? Why, to our surprise,

The instruments of the propagation of Christianity were a company of poor mechanics, publicans, tent-makers, and fishermen, from the despised nation of the Jews. And by what strange powers or arts did they make these extensive conquests?

The measures they took were a plain declaration of their religion; and they wrought miracles for its confirmation. They did not use the power of the sword, nor secular terrors, or bribery; they were without learning, without the arts of reasoning and persuasion; and without all the usual artifices of seducers to gain credit to their imposture. Here I cannot but take particular notice of that matchless simplicity that appears in the history of Christ and his apostles. The evangelists write in that artless, calm, and unguarded manner, which is natural to persons confident of the undeniable truth of what they assert; they do not write with that scrupulous caution which would argue any fear that they might be confuted. They simply relate the naked facts, and leave them to stand upon their own evidence. They relate the most amazing, the most moving things, with the most cool serenity, without any passionate exclamations and warm reflections. For example, they relate the most astonishing miracles, as the resurrection of

Lazarus, in the most simple, and, as it were, careless manner, without breaking out and celebrating the divine power of Christ. In the same manner they relate the most tragical circumstances of his condemnation and death, calmly mentioning matter of fact, without any invectives against the Jews, without any high eulogies upon Christ's innocence, without any rapturous celebrations of his grace in suffering all these things for sinners, and without any tender lamentations over their deceased Master. It is impossible for a heart so deeply impressed with such things, as theirs undoubtedly were, to retain this dispassionate serenity, unless laid under supernatural restraints; and there appears very good reasons for this restraint upon them, viz., that the gospel history might carry intrinsic evidences of its simplicity and artless impartiality; and that it might appear adapted to convince the judgments of men, and not merely to raise their passions. In this respect, the gospel-history is distinguished from all histories in the world: and can we think so plain, so undisguised, so artless a composure, the contrivance of designing impostors? Would not a consciousness that they might be detected keep them more upon their guard, and make them more ready to anticipate and confine objections, and take every artifice to recommend their cause, and prepossess the reader in its favour?

It only remains under this head, that I should

4. Show that the religion of Jesus proposes sufficient excitements to influence our faith and practice.

To enforce a system of doctrines and precepts, two things are especially necessary; that they should be made duty by competent authority, and matters of interest by a sanction of rewards and punishments. To which I may add, that the excitements are still stronger, when we are laid under the gentle obligations of gratitude. In all these respects the Christian religion has the most powerful enforcements.

The authority upon which we are required to receive the doctrines, and observe the precepts of Christianity, is no less than the authority of God, the supreme Lawgiver and infallible Teacher; whose wisdom to prescribe, and right to command, are indisputable; and we may safely submit our understandings to his instructions, however mysterious, and our wills to his injunctions, however difficult they may seem to us. This gives the religion of Jesus a binding authority upon the consciences of men; which is absolutely necessary to bring piety and virtue into practice in the world; for if men are left at liberty, they will follow their own inclinations, however wicked and pernicious. And in this respect, Christianity bears a glorious preference to all the systems of morality composed by the heathen philosophers; for though there were many good things in them, yet who gave authority to Socrates, Plato, or Seneca, to assume the province of

lawgivers, and dictators to mankind, and prescribe to their consciences? All they could do was to teach, to advise, to persuade, to reason; but mankind were at liberty, after all, whether to take their advice or not. And this shows the necessity of supernatural revelation not merely to make known things beyond human apprehension, but to enforce with proper authority such duties as might be discovered by man; since without it they would not have the binding force of a law.

As to the sanction of rewards and punishments in Christianity, they are such as became a God to annex to his majestic law, such as are agreeable to creatures formed for immortality, and such as would have the most effectual tendency to encourage obedience, and prevent sin; they are no less than the most perfect happiness and misery, which human nature is capable of, and that through an endless duration. If these are not sufficient to allure rational creatures to obedience, then no considerations that can be proposed can have any effect. These tend to alarm our hopes and our fears, the most vigorous springs of human activity: and if these have no effect upon us, nothing that God can reveal, or our minds conceive, will have any effect. God, by adding the greatest sanctions possible to his law, has taken the best possible precautions to prevent disobedience; and since even these do not restrain men from it, we are sure that less would not suffice.

If men will go on in sin, though they believe the punishment due to it will be eternal, then much more would they persist in it, if it were not eternal; or, if they say they will indulge themselves in sin, because they believe it not eternal, then this proves from their own mouth, that it should be eternal in order to restrain them. The prevalence of sin in the world tends to render it miserable; and therefore, to prevent it, as well as to display God's eternal regard to moral goodness, it is fit that he should annex the highest degree of punishment to disobedience in every individual; for the indulgence of sin in one individual would be a temptation to the whole rational creation; and, on the other hand, the threatenings of everlasting punishment to all sinners indefinitely, is necessary to deter the whole rational world, and every particular person from disobedience. Thus in civil government, it is necessary that robbery should be threatened indefinitely with death, because though one robber may take from a man but what he can very well spare; yet, if every man might rob and plunder his neighbour, the consequence would be universal robbery and confusion. It is therefore necessary that the greatest punishment should be threatened to disobedience, both to prevent it, and to testify the divine displeasure against it; which is the primary design of the threatening; and since the penalty was annexed with this view, it follows, that it was primarily enacted with a view to the happiness of man-

kind, by preventing what would naturally make them miserable, and but secondarily with a view to be executed; for it is to be executed only upon condition of disobedience; which disobedience it was intended to prevent, and consequently it was not immediately intended to be executed, or enacted for the sake of the execution, as though God took a malignant pleasure in the misery of his creatures. But when the penalty has failed of its primary end, restraining from sin, then it is fit it should answer its secondary end, and be executed upon the offender, to keep the rest of reasonable creatures in their obedience, to illustrate the veracity and holiness of the lawgiver, and prevent his government from falling into contempt. There are the same reasons that threatenings should be executed when denounced, as for their being denounced at first; for threatenings never executed, are the same with no threatenings at all.

Let me add, that the gospel lays us under the strongest obligations from gratitude. It not only clearly informs us of our obligations to God, as the author of our being, and all our temporal blessings, which natural religion more faintly discovers, but superadds those more endearing ones derived from the scheme of man's redemption through the death of the eternal Son of God. Though the blessings of creation and providence are great in themselves, they are swallowed up, as it were, and lost in the love of God; which is commended to us by this matchless circumstance, "that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us;" and while under the constraints of this love, we cannot but devote ourselves entirely to God, 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

Thus I have hinted at a few things among the many that might be mentioned to prove the divinity of the religion of Jesus, and its sufficiency to bring men to repentance and salvation. And if it be so, why should it be rejected, or another sought? This reminds me that I promised,

II. To expose the vanity and unreasonableness of the objection against the Christian religion, or of demanding another, &c.

What can our ingenious infidels offer against what has been said? It must be something very weighty indeed to preponderate all this evidence. A laugh, or a sneer, a pert witticism, declaiming against priestcraft and the prejudices of education, artful evasions, and shallow sophisms, the usual arguments of our pretended free-thinkers, these will not suffice to banter us out of our joyful confidence of the divinity of the religion of Jesus; and I may add, these will not suffice to indemnify them. Nothing will be sufficient for this but demonstration: it lies upon them to prove the Christian religion to be certainly false: otherwise, unless they are hardened to a prodigy, they must be racked with anxious fears lest they should find it true to their cost; and lest that dismal threatening should stand firm against them: "He that believeth not, shall be damned." What mighty

objections, then, have they to offer? Will they say that the Christian religion contains mysterious doctrines, which they cannot comprehend, which seem to them unaccountable? As that of the trinity, the incarnation, and satisfaction of Christ, &c. But will they advance their understanding to be the universal standard of truth? Will they pretend to comprehend the infinite God, in their finite minds? then let them go, and measure the heavens with a span, and comprehend the ocean in the hollow of their hand. Will they pretend to understand the divine nature, when they cannot understand their own? when they cannot account for or explain the union betwixt their own souls and bodies? Will they reject mysteries in Christianity, when they must own them in every thing else? Let them first solve all the phenomena in nature; let them give us a rational theory of the infinite divisibility of a piece of finite matter; let them account for the seemingly magical operation of the loadstone; the circulation of the blood upwards as well as downwards, contrary to all the laws of motion; let them inform us of the causes of the cohesion of the particles of matter; let them tell us, how spirits can receive ideas from material organs; how they hear and see, &c.: let them give us intelligible theories of these things, and then they may, with something of a better grace, set up for critics upon God and his ways; but, while they are mysteries to themselves, while every particle of matter baffles their understandings, it is the most impious intellectual pride to reject Christianity upon the account of its mysteries, and set up themselves as the supreme judges of truth.

Or will they object that there are a great many difficult and strange passages in Scripture, the meaning and propriety of which they do not see? And are there not many strange things in the book of nature, and the administration of Providence, the design and use of which they cannot see, many things that to them seem wrong and ill-contrived? Yet they own the world was created by God, and that his providence rules it: and why will they not allow that the Scriptures may be from God, notwithstanding these difficulties and seeming incongruities? When a learned man can easily raise his discourse above the capacity of common people, will they not condescend to grant that an infinite God can easily overshoot their little souls? Indeed a revelation which we could fully comprehend, would not appear the production of an infinite mind; it would bear no resemblance to its heavenly Father; and therefore we should have reason to suspect it spurious. It is necessary we should meet with difficulties in the Scriptures to mortify our pride. But farther, will they make no allowance for the different customs and practices of different ages? It is certain, that may be proper and graceful in one age which would be ridiculous and absurd in another; and since the Scriptures were written so many years ago, we may safely make this allowance for them, which will remove many seeming absurdities. There

should also allowance be made for the Scriptures being rendered literally out of dead, difficult languages; for we know that many expressions may be beautiful and significant in one language, which would be ridiculous and nonsensical if literally translated into another. Were Homer or Virgil thus translated into English, without regard to the idiom of the language, instead of admiring their beauties, we should be apt to think (as Cowley expresses it) “that one madman had translated another madman.”

Will they object the wicked lives of its professors against the holiness and good tendency of Christianity itself? But is it Christianity, as practised in the world, or Christianity as taught by Christ and his apostles, and continued in the Bible, that I am proving to be divine? You know it is the latter, and consequently the poor appearance it makes in the former sense, is no argument against its purity and divinity in this. Again, are the bad lives of professors taught and enjoined by genuine Christianity, and agreeable to it? No; they are quite contrary to it, and subversive of it; and it is so far from encouraging such professors, that it pronounces them miserable hypocrites; and their doom will be more severe than that of heathens. Again, are there not hypocritical professors of morality and natural religion, as well as of revealed? Are there not many who cry up morality and religion of nature, and yet boldly violate its plainest precepts? If therefore this be a sufficient objection against Christianity, it must be so too against all religion. Further: do men grow better by renouncing the religion of Jesus? Observation assures us quite the contrary. Finally, are there not some of the professors of Christianity who live habitually according to it? who give us the best patterns of piety and virtue that ever were exhibited to the world? This is sufficient to vindicate the religion they profess, and it is highly injurious to involve such promiscuously in the odium and contempt due to barefaced hypocrites. How would this reasoning please the Deists themselves in parallel cases? “Some that have no regard to Christianity have been murderers, thieves, &c., therefore all that disregard it are such.” Or “some that pretended to be honest, have been found villains; therefore all that pretend to it are such; or therefore honesty is no virtue.”

Or will they change the note, and instead of pleading that Christianity leads to licentiousness, object that it bears too hard upon the pleasures of mankind, and lays them under too severe restraints? Or that its penalties are excessive and cruel? But does it rob mankind of any pleasures worthy the rational nature, worthy the pursuit of creatures formed for immortality, and consistent with the good of the whole? It restrains them indeed; but it is only as a physician restrains his patient from poison or any improper regimen; it restrains men from living like beasts; it restrains them from those pleasures which will ruin their

souls and bodies in the event; it restrains them from gratifying a private passion at the expense of the public; in short, it restrains them from making themselves and others miserable. Hard restraint indeed! and the Deists, to be sure, are generous patrons of human liberty, who would free us from such grievances as these! However, this objection lets us into the secret, and informs us of the reason why our pretended free-thinkers are such enemies to Christianity; it is because it checks their lusts, and will not permit them to act, as well as think, freely, i.e., as they please. If they would content themselves with manly and rational pleasures, they would not count the restraints of Christianity intolerable; nay, they would find in it a set of peculiarly noble and refined pleasures, which they might seek in vain elsewhere; for it is so far from being an enemy to the happiness of man, that it was designed to promote it; and then we make ourselves miserable when we reject it, or it becomes our interest that it should be false. As to the penalty of everlasting punishment annexed to sin, which is but a temporal evil, I would ask them whether they are competent judges in a matter in which they are parties? Are they capable to determine what degree of punishment should be inflicted upon disobedience to the infinite Majesty of heaven, when they are not only short-sighted creatures, but also concerned in the affair, and their judgments may be perverted by self-interest? Whether it is most fit that the Judge of all the earth should determine this point, or a company of malefactors, as they are? Is it allowed to criminals in civil courts to determine their own doom, or pronounce their own sentence? If it were, few of them would be punished at all, and government would fall into contempt. Again, let me remind them, that the penalty was annexed to prevent disobedience, and so to render the execution needless; and consequently it was primarily intended for their good. Why then will they frustrate this design, and, when they have rendered the execution necessary, complain of its severity? If they think the penalty so terrible, let them watch against sin, let them accept the salvation the gospel offers, and so avoid it instead of quarreling with its severity, and yet rushing upon it. Or, if they say they will persist in sin because they do not believe the punishment is eternal; this gives me room to appeal to themselves whether a less penalty than everlasting misery would be sufficient to restrain them from sin; and whether God would have taken all proper precautions to prevent sin, if he had annexed a less punishment to his law, since by their own confession, nothing less could deter them from it. I shall only add, that as the human soul must always exist, and as by indulgence in sin in the present state it contracts such habits as render it incapable of happiness in the holy enjoyment of the heavenly world, it must by a natural necessity be for ever miserable, though God should not exert any positive act for its punishment. And if the Deists say, that pun-

ishment for some time would reclaim offenders from sin and bring them to repentance, the difficulty is not removed, unless they can prove that misery will bring men to love that God who inflicts it, which they can never do; and it is evident, that that repentance which proceeds merely from self-love, without any regard to God at all, can never be pleasing to him, nor prepare them for happiness in the enjoyment of him. Punishment would produce a repentance like that of a sick-bed, forced, servile, and transitory.

Will they object, that miracles are not a sufficient evidence of the truth and divinity of a revelation, because infernal spirits may also work miracles, as in the case of the magicians of Egypt, to confirm an imposture? But it is known that our free-thinkers explode and laugh at the existence and power of evil spirits in other cases, and therefore must not be allowed to admit them here to serve a turn. However, we grant there are infernal spirits, and that they can perform many things above human power, which may appear to us miraculous, and yet the evidence in favour of Christianity taken from miracles, stands unshaken: for, (1.) Can we suppose that these malignant and wicked spirits, whose business it is to reduce men to sin and ruin, would be willing to exert their power to work miracles to confirm so holy a religion; a religion so contrary to their design, and so subversive of their kingdom and interest? This would be wretched policy indeed. Or if we should suppose them willing, yet (2.) Can we think that God, who has them all at his control, would suffer them to counterfeit the great seal of heaven, and annex it to an imposture? that is, to work such miracles as could not be distinguished from those wrought by him to attest an imposture? Would he permit them to impose upon mankind in a manner that could not be detected? This would be to deliver the world to their management, and suffer them to lead them blindfold to hell in unavoidable delusion: for miracles are such dazzling and pompous evidences, that the general run of mankind could not resist them, even though they were wrought to attest a religion that might be demonstrated, by a long train of sublime reasoning, to be false. God may indeed suffer the devil to mimic the miracles wrought by his immediate hand, as in the case of Jannes and Jambres; but then, as in that case too, he will take care to excel them, and give some distinguishing marks of his almighty agency, which all mankind may easily discriminate from the utmost exertion of infernal power. But though Satan should be willing, and God should permit him to work miracles, yet, (3.) Can we suppose that all the united powers of hell are able to work such astonishing miracles as were wrought for the confirmation of the Christian religion? Can we suppose that they can control the laws of nature at pleasure, and that with an air of sovereignty, and professing themselves the lords of the universe, as we know Christ did? If we can believe this, then we

deny them, and may as well ascribe the creation and preservation of the world to them. If they could exert a creating power to form new limbs for the maimed, or to multiply five loaves and two fishes into a sufficient quantity of food for five thousand, and leave a greater quantity of fragments when that were done than the whole provision at first, then they might create the world, and support all the creatures in it. If they could animate the dead and remand the separate soul back to its former habitation, and reunite it with the body, then I see not why they might not have given us life at first. But to suppose this, would be to dethrone the King of heaven, and renounce his providence entirely. We therefore rest assured that the miracles related in the Scriptures were wrought by the finger of God.

But our free-thinkers will urge, how do we, at this distance, know that such miracles were actually wrought? they are only related in Scripture history; but to prove the truth of Scripture from arguments that suppose the Scripture true, is a ridiculous method of reasoning, and only a begging of the question. But, (1.) the reality of those miracles was granted by the enemies of Christianity in their writings against it; and they had no answer to make, but this sorry one, that they were wrought by the power of magic. They never durst deny that they were wrought; for they knew all the world could prove it. Indeed, an honorable testimony concerning them could not be expected from infidels; for it would be utterly inconsistent that they should own these miracles sufficient attestations of Christianity, and yet continue infidels. And this may answer an unreasonable demand of the Deists, that we should produce some honourable testimony concerning these attestations from Jews and Heathens, as well as from Christians, who were parties. We should have much more reason to suspect the testimony of the former as not convictive, when it did not convince the persons themselves. But,

(2.) As these miracles were of so public a nature, and as so many were concerned to detect them, that they would unavoidably have been detected when related in words, if they had not been done; so, for the same reasons, they could not but have been detected when related in writing; and this we know they never were. If these miracles had not been matters of undoubted fact, they could not have been inserted at first in the gospel history; for then, many thousands, in various countries were alive to confute them; and they could not have been introduced into it afterwards, for all the world would see that it was then too late, and that if there had been such things they should have heard of them before: for they were much more necessary for the propagation of Christianity than for its support when received.

But it may be objected, How can we at this distance know that these histories are genuine? May they not have been corrupted, and many additions made to them by designing men in ages since? And why is it not also asked, How do we know that there were such men as Alexander, Julius Caesar or King William the Third? How do we know but their histories are all romance and fable? How do we know that there were any generations of mankind before ourselves? How do we know but all the acts of Parliament of former reigns are corrupted and we are ruled by impositions? In short, how can we know anything, but what we have seen with our eyes? We may as well make difficulties of all these things, and so destroy all human testimony, as scruple the genuineness of the sacred writings; for never were any writings conveyed down with so good evidence of their being genuine and uncorrupted as these. Upon their first publication they were put into all hands, they were scattered into all nations, translated into various languages, and all perused them; either to be taught by them, or to cavil at them. And ever since, they have been quoted by thousands of authors, appealed to by all parties of Christians, as the supreme judge of controversies; and not only the enemies of Christianity have carefully watched them to detect any alterations which pious fraud might attempt to make, but one sect of Christians has kept a watchful eye over the other, lest they should alter anything in favour of their own cause. And it is matter of astonishment as well as conviction, that all the various copies and translations of the Scriptures in different nations and libraries are substantially the same, and differ only in matters of small moment; so that from the worst copy of translation in the world, one might easily learn the substance of Christianity.

Or will our infidels insist to be eye-witnesses of these facts? Must one arise from the dead, or new miracles be wrought to convince them by ocular demonstration? This is a most unreasonable demand, for (1.) The continuance of miracles in every age would be attended with numerous inconveniences. For example, Multitudes must be born blind, deaf, or dumb; multitudes must be afflicted with incurable diseases, and possessed by evil spirits; multitudes must be disturbed in the sleep of death; and all the laws of nature must be made precarious and fickle, in order to leave room for miraculous operations; and all this to humour a company of obstinate infidels, who would not believe upon less striking though entirely sufficient evidence. (2.) The continuance of miracles from age to age would destroy their very nature, to which it is essential, that they be rare and extraordinary; for what is ordinary and frequent, we are apt to ascribe to the established laws of nature, however wonderful it be in itself. For example, if we saw dead bodies rise from their graves, as often as we see vegetables spring from seed rotten in the earth, we should be no more surprised at the one phe-

nomenon than we are at the other, and our virtuosi would be equally busy to assign some natural cause for both.

And had we never seen the sun rise until this morning, we should justly have accounted it as great a miracle as any recorded in the Scriptures; but because it is common, we neglect it as a thing of course. Indeed, it is not anything in the event itself, or in the degree of power necessary for its accomplishment, that renders it miraculous, but its being uncommon, and out of the ordinary course of things; for example, the generation of the human body is not in itself less astonishing, nor does it require less power than its resurrection: the revolution of the sun in its regular course is as wonderful, and as much requires a divine power, as its standing still in the days of Joshua. But we acknowledge a miracle in the one case, but not in the other, because the one is extraordinary, while the other frequently occurs. Hence it follows, that the frequent repetition of miracles, as often as men are pleased to plead the want of evidence to excuse their infidelity, would destroy their very nature: and consequently, to demand their continuance is to demand an impossibility. But (3.) Suppose that men should be indulged in this request, it would not probably bring them to believe. If they are unbelievers now, it is not for want of evidence, but through wilful blindness and obstinacy; and as they that will shut their eyes can see no more in meridian light than in the twilight, so they that reject a sufficiency of evidence would also resist a superfluity of it. Thus the Jews, who were eye-witnesses of the miracles recorded in the Scriptures, continued invincible infidels still. They had always some trifling cavil ready to object against the brightest evidence. And thus our modern infidels would no doubt evade the force of the most miraculous attestation by some wretched hypothesis or other; they would look upon miracles either as magical productions, or illusions of their senses; or rather, as natural and necessary events, which they would indeed have some reason to conclude, if they were frequently performed before their eyes. Some have pretended to doubt of the existence and perfections of God, notwithstanding the evidences thereof upon this magnificent structure of the universe; and must God be always creating new worlds before these obstinate creatures for their conviction? Such persons have as much reason to demand it in this case, as our Deists have to insist for new miracles in the other. I might add, that such glaring evidence, as, like the light of the sun, would force itself irresistibly upon the minds of the most reluctant, would not leave room for us to show our regard to God in believing, for we should then believe from extrinsic necessity, and not from choice. It is therefore most correspondent to our present state of probation, that there should be something in the evidence of a divine revelation to try us;

something that might fully convince the teachable and yet not remove all umbrages for cavilling from the obstinate.

Thus I have answered as many objections as the bounds of a sermon would admit; and I think they are the principal ones which lie against my subject in the view I have considered it. And as I have not designedly selected the weakest, in order to an easy triumph, you may look upon the answers that have been given as a ground of rational presumption, that all other objections may be answered with equal ease. Indeed, if they could not, it would not invalidate the positive arguments in favour of Christianity; for when we have sufficient positive evidence for a thing, we do not reject it because it is attended with some difficulties which we cannot solve.

My time will allow me to make but two or three short reflections upon the whole.

1. If the religion of Jesus be attested with such full evidence, and be sufficient to conduct men to everlasting felicity, then how helpless are they that have enjoyed it all their life without profit: who either reject it as false, or have not felt its power to reform their hearts and lives? It is the last remedy provided for a guilty world; and if this fails, their disease is incurable, and they are not to expect better means.

2. If the religion of Jesus be true, then woe unto the wicked of all sorts: woe to infidels, both practical and speculative, for all the curses of it are in full force against them, and I need not tell you how dreadful they are.

3. If the religion of Jesus be true, then I congratulate such of you, whose hearts and lives are habitually conformed to it, and who have ventured your everlasting all upon it. You build upon a sure foundation, and your hope shall never make you ashamed.

Finally, Let us all strive to become rational and practical believers of this heaven-born religion. Let our understandings be more rationally and thoroughly convinced of its truth; and our hearts and lives be more and more conformed to its purity; and ere long we shall receive those glorious rewards it insures to all its sincere disciples; which may God grant to us all for Jesus' sake; AMEN!