

CHAPTER I.

OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURE

SECTION I.—Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation; therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church; and afterwards for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.

EXPOSITION

THERE are few doctrines of supernatural revelation that have not, in one period or another, been denied or controverted; and it is a peculiar excellence of the Westminster Confession of Faith, that its compilers have stated the several articles in terms the best calculated, not only to convey an accurate idea of sacred truth but to guard against contrary errors. In opposition, on the one hand, to those who deny the existence of natural religion, and, on the other hand, in opposition to Deists, who maintain the sufficiency of the light of nature to guide men to eternal happiness, this section asserts,—

1. That a knowledge of the existence of God, and a number of his perfections, is attainable by the light of nature, and the world of creation and providence.

2. That the light of nature is insufficient to give fallen man that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation.

3. That God has been pleased to grant to his Church a supernatural revelation of his will.

4. That this revelation has been committed to writing, and that the Holy Scripture is most necessary, the ancient modes of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.

First. That there is a God is the first principle of all religion, whether natural or revealed, and we are here taught that the being of God and a number of his perfections may be discovered by the light of nature. By the word God is meant a Being of infinite perfection; self-existent and independent; the Crea-

tor, Preserver, and Lord of all things. "It is true, indeed, that to give a perfect definition of God is impossible, neither can our finite reason hold any proportion with infinity; but yet a sense of this Divinity we have, and the find and common notion of it consists in these three particulars,—that it is a Being of itself, and independent from any other; that it is that upon which all things that are made depend; that it governs all things." When we affirm that the being of God may be discovered by the light of nature, we mean, that the senses and the reasoning powers, which belong to the nature of man, are able to give him so much light as to manifest that there is a God. By our senses we are acquainted with his works, and by his works our reason may be led to trace out that more excellent Being who made them. This the Scripture explicitly asserts, Rom. i 19, 20: "That which may be known of God is manifest in them (i.e., in men), for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead." The existence of God is not less indubitable than our own existence. Every man knows, with absolute certainty, that he himself exists. He knows also that he had a beginning, and that he derived his being from a succession of creatures like himself. However far back he supposes this succession to be carried, it does not afford a satisfactory account of the cause of his existence. His ancestors were no more able to make themselves than he was; he must, therefore, ascend to some original Being, who had no beginning, but had life in himself from all eternity, and who gives life and being to all other creatures. This is the Being whom we call God. But "we are not only conscious of our own existence, we also know that there exists a great variety of other things, both material and spiritual. It is equally inconceivable that these things should have existed from all eternity in their present state, or that they should have fallen into this state by chance; and, consequently, as there was a time when they did not exist, and as it was impossible for them to produce themselves, it follows that there was some exterior agent or creator to whom the world owed its being and form: that agent or creator we call God." The amazing works of providence, the regular and unerring motions of the heavenly luminaries for so many thousand years, the never failing return of summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, day and night, and innumerable other wonders, clearly manifest the existence of a Supreme Being, who upholds and governs all things. In the works of creation and providence, too, we see the clearest characters of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness. "The more that we know of these works, we are the more sensible that in nature there is not only an exertion of power, but an adjustment of means to an end, which is what we call wisdom, and an adjustment of means to the end of distributing happiness to all the creatures, which is the highest conception that we can form of goodness."

As the marks of a Deity are so clearly impressed upon all the works of creation, so we learn from the history of former times, and from the observation of modern travellers, that in every country, and at every period, some idea

of a Superior Being, and some species of divine worship, have prevailed. The persuasion of a God is universal, and the most ancient records do not conduct us to a period in the history of any people when it did not exist. That truth must certainly be a dictate of nature, to which all nations have consented. There is much practical Atheism in the world, but it may be questioned whether any have been able entirely to erase from their mind the impression of a Supreme Being. It is, indeed, affirmed, Ps. xiv. 1, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God;" but it is rather the wish of the unsanctified affections, than the proper determination of the deliberate judgment, which these words express. Though some may in words disavow the being of God, let the terrors which they feel in their own breasts, especially upon the commission of some daring wickedness, force upon them the conviction that there is a Supreme Being, who will judge and punish the transgressors of his law. Conscience, indeed, is in the place of a thousand witnesses to this truth. The Apostle Paul, who tells us that "there is a law written in the hearts of men," adds that "their conscience bears witness, and their thoughts accuse, or else excuse one another."—Rom. ii. 15. Conscience reproveth, condemns, and scourges a man for his wicked deeds, and anticipates the account which he must give of all his actions, and thus demonstrates that there is a God. The Scriptures, accordingly, take the being of God for granted, and instead of first proving that there is a God, begin with telling us what God did. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."—Gen. i. 1.

This knowledge of God, which is attainable by the light of nature, serves various useful purposes. It is a testimony of the goodness of God towards all his creatures.—Acts xiv. 17. As it shows men their duty, and convinces them of sin, in many points; so it has had some influence on mankind, at least by the fear of punishment, in restraining them from extreme degrees of wickedness.—Rom. ii. 14, 15. It excites men to seek after a clearer revelation of God, and prepares the way for their receiving the gospel of his grace.—Acts xvii. 27. It serves to vindicate the conduct of God as a righteous governor, in his severe dealing with obstinate sinners, both here and hereafter. This will leave them without excuse in the great day, when God shall judge the secrets of all hearts.—Rom. i. 20, 21, and ii. 15, 16. But the knowledge of God by the light of nature being obscure and defective,

The second proposition asserts the insufficiency of the light of nature to give fallen man that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation. The extent of knowledge, in regard to the things of God, which man is capable of attaining, cannot be ascertained from the writings of modern Deists, who, how much soever they affect to despise supernatural revelation, have derived the greater part of their sentiments respecting God, and moral obligation, from that source. The history of past times and ancient nations shows, that the greater part of mankind, in every country destitute of supernatural revelation, knew but little of the true God, or of their duty towards him. "The world by wisdom knew not God;" even the learned Athenians were so

ignorant of the true God that they dedicated an altar "to the unknown God." The heathen world was sunk in the most abominable idolatry and gross superstition. Not only were the heavenly luminaries deified, but almost every creature on earth was worshipped as a god, and innumerable imaginary beings had divine honours paid them. Though some heathen philosophers attained some considerable knowledge of the nature of God, and inculcated upon their followers several moral virtues, this did not prevent them from complying with the idolatry of their country, or deter them from the commission of the most gross and unnatural crimes.—Rom. i. 21-28. From the light of nature we may learn that there is evil both moral and penal in the world; but as to the question how sin entered into the world, and how deliverance from it may be obtained, the light of nature is entirely silent. It shows men their sin and misery, but it discovers not the plain and certain way of salvation. The Scriptures assure us, that there is no salvation for sinful men in any other name but that of Jesus Christ,—that there is no salvation through him but by faith, and that there can be no faith nor knowledge of Christ but by revelation.—Acts iv, 12; Mark xvi. 16; Rom. x. 14-17. The Scripture affirms, in terms the most express, that "where there is no vision," or revelation, "the people perish;" and it describes those who are destitute of divine revelation, as "having no hope, and without God in the world."—Prov. xxix. 18; Eph. ii. 12. God does nothing in vain; and were the light of nature sufficient to guide men to eternal happiness, it cannot be supposed that a divine revelation would have been given. But,—

The third proposition asserts, that God has been pleased to grant to his Church a supernatural revelation of his will. It cannot be considered as a thing incredible that God should make a revelation of his mind and will to men. Has he framed men so as that they should be capable of making known their mind to one another, by speech and by writing? And shall it be deemed a thing incredible that he should communicate his mind to them in a similar way? "It was, indeed, out of infinite love, mercy, and compassion, that God would at all reveal his mind and will unto sinners. He might for ever have locked up the treasures of his wisdom and prudence, wherein he abounds towards us in his Word, in his own eternal breast. He might have left all the sons of men unto that woeful darkness, whereinto by sin they had cast themselves, and kept them, with the angels who sinned before them, under the chains and power of it, unto the judgment of the great day. But from infinite love he condescended to reveal himself and his will unto us." The mind God was not revealed to the Church all at once, but by several parts and degrees, as in his infinite wisdom he saw meet. He spake unto the fathers by the prophets at sundry times, and in divers manners."—Heb. i. 1. The "sundry times" may be understood "as referring to the matter of ancient revelation, given in different parts, and at different times, thus conveying the idea of the gradual development of truth in different ages, and by different persons;" and the "divers manners" may be understood "as indicating the various ways in which these revelations were communicated, i.e., by dreams, visions, symbols, Urim and Thummim, pro-

phetic ecstasy, &c." Under the new dispensation, God has completed the whole revelation of his will by his Son, and no new revelation is to be expected to the end of the world.

The fourth proposition asserts, that this revelation has been committed to writing until the time of Moses, or for a period of two thousand five hundred years, no part of the sacred books was written. God then communicated his will to the Church by immediate revelation; and the long lives of the patriarchs enabled them to preserve uncorrupted what was so revealed, and to transmit it from generation to generation. Two persons might have conveyed it down from Adam to Abraham; for Methuselah lived above three hundred years while Adam was yet alive, and Shem lived almost a hundred years with Methuselah and above a hundred years with Abraham. But after the lives of men severe shortened, and revelation was greatly enlarged, it pleased God that the whole of his revealed will should be committed to writing, that the Church might have a standing rule of faith and practice, by which all doctrines might be examined, and all actions regulated,—that sacred truth might be preserved uncorrupted and entire,—that it might be propagated throughout the several nations of the earth, and might be conveyed down to all succeeding generation. Though, in the infancy of the Church, God taught his people without the written Word, yet now that he former ways of revealing his will to his people have ceased, the Holy Scripture, or written Word, is most necessary. Without this the Church would be left to the uncertainty of tradition and oral teaching; but the written Word is a sure test of doctrines, and a light in a dark place, both of which are most necessary.—Isa viii. 20; 2 Pet. i. 19.

SECTION II.—Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testaments, which are these:

OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis	I Kings	Ecclesiastes	Amos
Exodus	II Kings	The Song of Solomon	Obadiah
Leviticus	I Chronicles	Isaiah	Jonah
Numbers	II Chronicles	Jeremiah	Micah
Deuteronomy	Ezra	Lamentations	Nahum
Joshua	Nehemiah	Ezekiel	Habakkuk
Judges	Esther	Daniel	Zephaniah
Ruth	Job	Hosea	Haggai
I Samuel	Psalms	Joel	Zechariah
II Samuel	Proverbs		Malachi

OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew	Acts of the Apostles	Galatians	I Thessalonians
Mark	Romans	Ephesians	II Thessalonians
Luke	I Corinthians	Philippians	I Timothy
John	II Corinthians	Colossians	II Timothy

Titus	James	I John	Jude
Philemon	I Peter	II John	Revelation
Hebrews	II Peter	III John	

All which are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life.

Section III.—The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of Scripture; and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings.

EXPOSITION.

These sections relate to the true canon, and the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. In opposition to the Romish Church, which reckons the apocryphal books of equal authority with the Scriptures, it is asserted that these books are no part of the canon of the Scripture; and in opposition to the Deists, who deny that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, it is affirmed that all the sacred books are given by inspiration of God.

The term Scriptures signifies writings in general, but is appropriated to the Word of God, which is also, by way of eminency, called the Bible, or book, because it is incomparably the best of all books. The sacred books are divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament. The former includes those books which were written under the old dispensation of the covenant of grace, or prior to the incarnation of the Son of God; the latter includes those books which were written after the commencement of the new dispensation, or posterior to the advent of Christ. The Apostle Paul lays a foundation for this distinction; for he uses the phrases Old Testament and New Testament, and in one instance designates the writings of Moses and the prophets by the former title.—2. Cor. iii. 14. The word canon literally signifies a rule, and was early used to designate the Inspired Scriptures, which form a perfect rule of faith and life.

The Sacred Scriptures are now collected into one volume, but that volume contains a considerable number of separate books, written by different persons, and in different ages. How, then, do we ascertain the authenticity and genuineness of each of these books, and why do we receive them as canonical, to the exclusion of all others? In determining a question of this kind, we must employ the same method which we follow when the genuineness of any other book is the subject of investigation. How do we know that the books which bear the names of Homer, Horace, Tacitus, and Livy were really composed by them, but by the uniform testimony of all succeeding ages? In the same way do we ascertain that the writings of the Apostles and Evangelists are genuine; we have the testimony of their contemporaries and immediate successors, who

are the most competent witnesses in this case. The task of searching the records of antiquity has been undertaken by learned men, and executed with great industry and zeal. The result of their inquiries is, that the books now included in the New Testament were received as inspired by the primitive Church, and numerous passages were quoted from them by the earliest Christian writers; that catalogues of these books, which coincide with ours, are inserted in the works of different authors who flourished in the third and fourth centuries; and that these books were publicly read in Christian congregations, and were continually appealed to by Christian writers, as the standard of faith, and the supreme judge of controversies. The canon of the Old Testament is ascertained by a short process,—we know that the Jews arranged their sacred books into three classes, the Law, the Prophets, and the Hagiography, or holy Writings. Now, our Lord, just before his ascension, thus addressed his disciples,—”These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms concerning me.”—Luke xxiv. 44. The Psalms are here put for the Hagiography, probably because they were the principal book, or occupied the first place in that division. Our Lord, by adopting this common division of the sacred books, which comprehended all the Hebrew Scriptures, ratified the canon of the Old Testament, as it was received by the Jews. This, however, does not determine what particular books were then included in the Sacred Volume; but on this point we have the testimony of the Jewish historian, Josephus, who indeed does not name the books of the Old Testament, but he numbers them, and so describes them that there is scarcely room for any mistake. His testimony is corroborated by that of several of the early Christian fathers, who have furnished us with catalogues of the books of the Old Testament, from which it appears, that the canon then existing was the same as that which we now possess. Besides, a Greek translation of the Old Testament, known by the name of The Septuagint, was made two hundred and seventy years before the Christian era, which are the same books that are at present found in the Hebrew copies.

The books commonly called Apocrypha were never admitted into the list of canonical books, until the Council of Trent, at its fourth session, 1546, placed them in the same rank with the inspired writings. They are rejected by the Protestant Churches for the following reasons:—The Jews, to whom the oracles of God were committed, and who were never blamed for unfaithfulness to their trust, never acknowledged these books to be of divine authority. They were not written in the Hebrew, but in the Greek language, and the authors of them were posterior to Malachi, in whom, according to the universal testimony of the Jews, the spirit of prophecy ceased. No part of these books is quoted by Christ or his apostles, nor a single word found in all the New Testament from which it can be inferred that such books were in existence. These books contain many things erroneous, superstitious, and immoral; and some of the writers, instead of advancing a claim to inspiration, acknowledge their own

weakness, and apologise for their defects. The Church of England, though she does not receive the apocryphal books as canonical Scripture, and therefore does not "apply them to establish any doctrine," yet she directs certain portions of them to be read in the church, "for example of life, and instruction of manners." Now, as these portions are read promiscuously with the lessons taken from the canonical books, and no notice is given to the people that they are selected from the Apocrypha, they are in reality undistinguished from the inspired writings; and however good and instructive these apocryphal lessons may be, it never can be justified that they should thus be put on a level with the Word of God.

The Holy Scripture is called the Word of God, because it is given by inspiration of God. "The possibility of inspiration seems to be granted by all who profess to be Christians, though there is a great diversity of opinion with respect to its nature and degrees, as applied to the Scriptures. Some are of opinion that the inspiration of the Scriptures amounted to nothing more than a mere superintendence over the minds of the sacred writers, so as to prevent them from publishing gross errors. Others go a little further, and maintain that, besides superintendence, the understandings of the several writers were enlarged,—that their conceptions were elevated above the measure of ordinary men,—and that with their minds thus elevated, they were left to their own judgment both as to matter and words. The advocates of plenary inspiration, again, maintain that the Holy Spirit suggested to the minds of the persons inspired not only the matter to be communicated, but also the words in which the communication was to be made. A fourth party are for taking in all these supposed kinds of inspiration now mentioned; and they maintain that the sacred writers sometimes wrote under mere superintendence, sometimes under superintendence accompanied with a high elevation of conception, and at other times under a divine suggestion, or what is called plenary inspiration, according to the nature of the subject on which they wrote."

At no remote period, the plenary and verbal inspiration of the Scriptures was very generally abandoned. Events, however, have occurred of late years, which have occasioned a more thorough investigation of the subject; and the most eminent writers who have treated of it more lately, maintain the plenary inspiration of the sacred books in opposition to those who hold that it was merely partial and occasional, and their verbal inspiration, in opposition to those who hold that only the sentiment or matter, and not the words are inspired. "We are humbly of opinion," says Dr Stevenson, "that inspiration, as employed in communicating the sacred oracles to men, is only of one kind, and that this is the inspiration of suggestion, according to which not only the matter, but the words also, were communicated to the minds of the sacred writers. 1. The Scriptures themselves take notice of only one kind of inspiration, and represent it as extending to all the parts of Scripture,—to those which are historical and moral, as well as to those which are prophetic and doctrinal.—2 Tim. iii 16, 17; 2 Pet. i. 21. 2. There must have been more than an en-

largement of the understanding, and an elevation of conception in inspiration, since a great many of the things were such as could not have entered into the hearts of men or of angels, had they not been suggested to the mind by the Divine Spirit. Of this description were the events foretold by the sacred writ many years before they took place, and the whole of the doctrines that relate to the supernatural plan of man's redemption.—1 Cor. ii. 9, 10. 3. For similar reasons we must insert for the suggestion not only of the idea, but also of the words of Scripture. To us it is altogether inconceivable how the sacred writers, who, like other men, were accustomed to think in words, could have the ideas suggested to their own minds, except in words; or how they could have written intelligibly about future events, with which they could have had no previous acquaintance, and on doctrinal subjects, far above their comprehension, had not the language, as well as the matter, been furnished to them by Divine suggestion.—1 Cor. ii. 13. 4. If what has been called the inspiration of superintendence and elevation, could in any case be deemed to have been sufficient, it must have been in cases where the sacred writers may be supposed to have had a prior acquaintance, from other sources, with the subjects on which they were called to write; such as subjects of morality and history. But even in these cases, plenary inspiration seems to have been absolutely necessary. With regard to moral subjects, it may be observed, that although the remains of the law of nature furnish man with certain moral sentiments, yet, in his fallen state, his views of right and wrong are so dark and confused, that there is not, perhaps, any case in which plenary inspiration was more necessary than this, in order that man might be furnished with a perfect rule of duty. With respect to history, where the facts recorded may be supposed to have been known by the sacred writers from their own observation, or from other authentic sources, it may be observed, in general, that sacred history differs in the main ends proposed by it, from profane history." While profane history has for its object only the civil and political benefit of individuals and nations, the inspired historians propose a much higher aim—the advancement of salvation in subservience to the glory of God in Christ,—an aim which requires a manner of thinking and writing peculiar to itself. "Neither does the variety of style found throughout the Scriptures form, in our apprehension, any valid objection to the doctrine of plenary inspiration. Though the inspired penmen were under infallible direction, both in regard to the sentiments to be communicated by them, and the phraseology best adapted to express these sentiments; yet the Holy Spirit, for wise reasons, seems to have accommodated his suggestions, so far as relates to mere style, to the age in which they wrote, and their respective talents for composition. 5. We observe farther, in support of plenary inspiration, that unless it be admitted the Bible has no valid claim to be called the Word of God. The Scriptures frequently lay claim to a divine origin in support of their supreme authority as a rule of faith and manners; but if the sacred writers were only under what is called superintendence, we cannot see the justness of that claim. It would be a gross perversion of words, to call a man the author of a

book, who had no hand in its composition further than merely guarding its real author from falling into gross error. The designation, the Word of God, must suggest to every unprejudiced mind, that the Bible is from God, both in respect of sentiment and expression. Nor does it render the matter any better to tell us, that though some parts of the Bible were written under the mere superintendence of the Spirit, yet others were written by the inspiration of suggestion; for this throws a suspicion over the whole, since it is impossible for us to determine what parts were dictated by plenary inspiration, and what parts were not. The safe way is to hold by the doctrine of the Bible itself, that inspiration is one in kind; that it is not a partial, but a full plenary inspiration; and that this applies to the whole of the sacred volume. 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.'

SECTION IV.—The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.

SECTION V.—We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture; and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.

EXPOSITION

These sections teach us, that the authority of the Scripture depends not upon any man or Church, but wholly upon God, the author thereof, and then points out the evidences that the Scripture is the Word of God. The first of these heads is stated in opposition to the Papists, who maintain that the authority of the Scriptures is derived from the Church. The absurdity of this idea is easily evinced. The true Church of Christ is founded on the Scriptures, and

therefore the authority of the Scriptures cannot depend on the Church.—Eph. ii. 20.

That the Holy Scripture is the Word of God is proved both by external and internal evidences. 1. The eternal evidences are such as these:—The character of the sacred penmen—the miracles wrought by them, for the declared purpose of attesting their divine mission and inspiration—the exact accomplishment of numerous prophecies recorded in Scripture—the antiquity of the Scriptures, taken in connection with their wonderful preservation to this day—the effects produced by the Scriptures, effects which could never have been accomplished by the lessons of philosophy, nor the force of human laws—and the influence which the Scriptures have had in civilising the most barbarous nations, and in meliorating the condition of society at large, wherever the knowledge of them has been disseminated. 2. The internal evidences are such as these:—The incomparable sublimity of the doctrines contained in the Scriptures, and their revealing many truths which could not be discovered by nature or reason—the extent and purity of their precepts—the representation which they give of the character and moral administration of God—the exact adaptation of the revelation they contain to the state and wants of man—the entire harmony of their several parts, though written by different persons, and in different ages—the majesty of their style—and the scope and tendency of the whole to advance the glory of God, and secure the salvation of men. Such arguments as these may produce a rational conviction that the Scriptures are the Word of God; but it is only the Holy Spirit's effectual application of them to the heart, in their self-evidencing light and power, that can produce a cordial and saving persuasion of it. "He that believeth hath the witness in himself." Though many who believe are not qualified to demonstrate the inspiration of the Scriptures by rational arguments, yet, by the experience they have of their power and efficacy on their own hearts, they are infallibly assured that they are the Word of God; and they can no more be convinced, by the reasonings and objections of infidels, that the Scriptures are the production of men, than they can be persuaded that men created the sun, whose light they behold, and by whose beams they are cheered.

SECTION VI.—The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word; and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and the government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.

SECTION VII.—All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.

EXPOSITION

These Sections relate to the perfection and perspicuity of the Scriptures.

1. In regard to the perfection, or sufficiency, of the Scriptures, it is acknowledged that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church in regard to which no express injunctions are given in Scripture, and which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word. The Apostolic rule in such cases is,—“Let all things be done decently and in order,”—1 Cor. xiv. 40; but this general rule does not authorise the introduction into the Church of rites and ceremonies of human invention, in order to set off the worship of God. This cannot be justified by any plea of expediency, with a view of rendering the services of the Church more attractive, and conciliating those that are without. “And it may be here remarked, that it was one of the first and greatest mistakes into which the Church fell, after inspiration ceased, to make too free a use of this doctrine of expediency. The abuses which have crept it under this specious diagnose were not foreseen. The Fathers saw no harm in an indifferent ceremony, to which, perhaps, their new converts were attached from long custom. By adopting things of this kind, the Church, which was at first simple, and unencumbered with rites, became strangely metamorphosed; and in place of her simple robe of white, assumed a gorgeous dress, tricked off with gaudy ornaments and various colours. And this practice of in-

venting new ceremonies went on increasing, until, in process of time, the burdensome ritual of the Levitical law was not comparable to the liturgy of the Christian Church. Who that now attends a Romish chapel on some 'high day,' would suppose that the service performed was connected with the religion of the New Testament?"

In maintaining the perfection of the Scriptures, we do not insist that every article of religion is contained in Scripture in so many words; but we hold that conclusions fairly deduced from the declarations of the Word of God are as truly parts of divine revelation as if they were expressly taught in the Sacred Volume. That good and necessary consequences deduced from Scripture are to be received as part of the rule of our faith and practice, is evident from the example of our Saviour in proving the doctrine of the resurrection against the Sadducees,—Matt. xxii. 31, 32; and from the example of Paul, who proved that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, by reasoning with the Jews out of the Old Testament Scriptures.—Acts xvii. 2, 3. "All Scripture" is declared to be "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness;" but all these ends cannot be obtained, unless by the deduction of consequences. Legitimate consequences, indeed, only bring out the full meaning of the words of Scripture; and as we are endued with the faculty of reason, and commanded to search the Scriptures, it was manifestly intended that we should draw conclusions from what is therein set down in express words.

By the perfection of Scripture, then, we mean, that the Scripture, including necessary consequences as well as the express words, contains a complete revelation of the will of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life. The Scripture is represented as perfect, fitted to answer every necessary end,—Ps. xix. 8, 9; it is sufficient to make "the man of God perfect," and able to make private Christians "wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus."—2 Tim. iii. 15-17. So complete is the Scripture, that its Author has peremptorily prohibited either to add to, or to diminish ought from it.—Deut. iv. 2; Rev. xxii. 18, 19.

The perfection of the Scriptures is to be maintained in opposition to those enthusiasts who pretend to new revelations of the Spirit, and in opposition to the Church of Rome, which "receives traditions with the same veneration that they do the Scriptures." No new revelations are to be added to the oracles of God, for Christ and his apostles have foretold the rise of false prophets, and warned us not to give heed to their pretended revelations.—Matt. xxiv. 11, 24. The Apostle Paul denounces a curse upon all who preach any other gospel than that which is contained in the Scriptures.—Gal. i. 8, 9. The uncertainty of private revelations furnishes another argument against them. Such is the deceitfulness of the heart, that men are apt to mistake their own fancies and imaginations for revelations of the Spirit, and such is the subtlety of Satan, that he sometimes transforms himself into an angel of light. Private revelations, therefore, must be very uncertain to ourselves, and much more so to others. And it may be observed, that none plead for the authority of private revela-

tions but such as, by the contrariety of their opinions and practices to the Scriptures, manifest themselves to be led by a spirit of delusion.

Neither are the traditions of men to be added to the Word of God. Traditions have been a fertile source of corruption in religion, both among Jews and Christians. The Jews pretended that besides what Moses committed to writing, he received from God a variety of revelations, which he communicated verbally to Aaron, and which were orally transmitted from generation to generation. These traditions multiplied exceedingly, especially after the Spirit of prophecy was withdrawn from the Church; and when Christ appeared on earth, he found the Jews so far degenerated, that their religion consisted almost entirely in the observation of such traditions. Hence we find him declaring, "Ye have made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition." "In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."—Matt. xv. 6, 9. In the same way have a multitude of the corruptions in the doctrine and worship of the Romish Church sprung up. They, after the example of the Jews, pretend that Christ and his apostles delivered many things which are not found in the Scriptures, and which have come down to us by tradition. But how can it be shown that those articles of religion, or institutions of worship, which they say have come down by tradition, were really received from the mouth of Christ, or from the teaching of his apostles? Or, supposing that they were derived from this source, how can it be ascertained that they have been conveyed down to us without alteration or corruption? The fact is, many of these traditions, which are called apostolic, can be traced to their commencement, at a period much later than that of the apostles. To admit unwritten traditions would open a door for all the innovations and corruptions which the fancies of men may devise, and would make void the law of God. But as our Lord strongly condemned the Jewish traditions, so we justly reject the mass of traditions received by the Romish Church.

2. The Scriptures are clear and perspicuous in all things necessary to salvation. We allow that there are doctrines revealed in the Scriptures which surpass the comprehension of created beings, such as, the doctrine of the Trinity, the eternal generation and the incarnation of the Son of God. These are mysteries which we cannot comprehend, but the doctrines themselves are plainly taught in the Scriptures, and we must receive them on the divine testimony. We also admit that in the Scriptures there are some things obscure and "hard to be understood." But this obscurity is chiefly in history and prophecies, which do not so nearly concern our salvation. As in nature everything necessary for the support of life occurs almost everywhere, and may be found on the most easy search, while other things less necessary, such as its gems and gold, lie concealed in certain places, and can only be discovered and obtained by great exertions and unwearied industry; so there are things in the Scriptures, ignorance of which will not endanger the salvation of the soul, that are abstruse and difficult to be understood, even by those who possess acute minds and great learning. But we maintain that all those things which are necessary

to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly revealed in some place of Scripture or other, that every serious inquirer, in the due use of ordinary means, may understand them. This may be inferred from the fact that their author is God. If he intended them to be a rule of faith and life to men, surely he has adapted them to the understandings of men. There are numerous injunctions to read and search the Scriptures, but these necessarily imply that they are perspicuous and intelligible. Christians are also commended for searching the Scriptures, and trying by the written Word the doctrines delivered to them.—Acts xvii. 11. If the Scriptures were unintelligible to common Christians, and the interpretation of the Church were necessary to discover their meaning, then such Christians would have no foundation upon which a divine Witness could rest. Their faith must be ultimately resolved into the testimony of men; but human testimony, being fallible, cannot be the ground of an infallible persuasion.

Notwithstanding the subjective perspicuity of the Scriptures, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in them. This arises from the blindness and perversity of the human understanding, as now corrupted and depraved.—1 Cor. ii. 14. If the enlightening influences of the Holy Spirit were unnecessary, then the greatest adepts in human literature would be best acquainted with the Scriptures; this, however, is not the case.—Matt. xi. 25. In the promises of God, and in the prayers of the saints, the special illumination of the Spirit is represented as necessary to enable us savingly to understand the things of God.—John xiv. 26; Ps. cxix 18, &c.

SECTION VIII.—The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as in all controversies of religion the Church is finally to appeal unto them. But because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God who have right unto, and interest in, the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the language of every people unto which they come, that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner, and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.

SECTION IX.—The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture, is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture (which is not manifold, but

one), it may be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.

SECTION X.—The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.

EXPOSITION

There are four heads embraced in these sections. First, That the Scriptures, in the original languages, have come down to us uncorrupted, and are, therefore, authentic. Secondly, That the Scriptures are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come. Thirdly, That the infallible rule of the interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself. Fourthly, That the Scriptures are the supreme standard of religious truth, and that the Supreme Judge, by which all controversies in religion are to be determined, is the Holy Spirit speaking to us in the Scriptures.

1. The Old Testament, except a few passages which were written in Chaldee, was originally written in Hebrew, the language of the Jews, to whom the prophetic oracles were committed. The passages which were written in Chaldee, are the eleventh verse of the tenth chapter of the Prophecies of Jeremiah; from the second verse of the fourth chapter of Daniel, to the end of the seventh chapter; and the fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters of Ezra. The New Testament was originally written in Greek, the language which, at the time of writing it, was most universally known. The original language of the Gospel according to Matthew is indeed a subject of controversy. The ancients, with one voice, affirm that it was written in Hebrew, and this opinion is supported by many modern critics; others, equally learned, maintain that it was originally composed in Greek. Several of the latest writers on this subject have adopted the opinion that there were two originals, Hebrew and Greek, both written by Matthew himself,—the one for the use of the Jews, the other for the use of the Gentiles. Though the autographs of the inspired writings have long since disappeared, yet there is ample evidence that by the singular care and providence of God, they have been preserved pure in all ages, and that the copies which we now possess generally coincide with the originals. The purity of the Old Testament Scriptures is confirmed by the general coincidence of the present Hebrew copies with all the early translations, and particularly with the Septuagint version. It may also be observed, that although our Lord frequently reproved the rulers and teachers of the Jews for their erroneous and false doctrines, yet he never accused them of any corruption in their sacred books; and the Apostle Paul reckons it among the privileges of the Jews, that to them "were committed the oracles of God," without ever insinuating that they had

been unfaithful to their trust. The animosity which has ever since prevailed betwixt Jews and Christians has rendered it impossible for either of them to vitiate these sacred writings without immediate detection. The corruption of the books of the New Testament is altogether incredible. Had any party entertained a wish to alter them, it would have been impossible for them to succeed. Copies were speedily multiplied; they were early translated into the different languages of the several nations among which the gospel was planted; the Christian fathers embodied numerous quotations from them into their writings; various sects soon arose, keenly opposed to each other, but all receiving the same sacred books, and these became a check upon each other, and rendered corruptions and interpolations impracticable. Every succeeding age increased the difficulty; and though the comparison of a multitude of ancient manuscripts and copies has discovered a vast number of various readings, occasioned by the inadvertence and inaccuracy of transcribers, yet none of these differences affect any one article of the faith and comfort of Christians.

2. As the Scriptures were originally written in the languages which, at the time of writing them, were most generally understood, God has hereby intimated his will, that they should be translated into the vernacular language of different nations, that every one may read and understand them. This we maintain in opposition to the Church of Rome, which forbids the translation of the Scriptures into the vulgar languages, and declares the indiscriminate reading of them to be highly dangerous. Though the free use of the Scriptures be prohibited by that Church, they were certainly intended by God for all ranks and classes of mankind. All are enjoined to read the Scriptures (John v. 39); and the laity are commended not only for searching them, but for trying the doctrines of their public teachers by them.—Acts xvii. 11. It is, therefore, necessary that the Scriptures should be translated into the language of every nation; and the use of translations is sanctioned by the apostles, who frequently quoted passages of the Old Testament from the Septuagint.

3. The best and only infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture, is the Scripture itself. Some things that are briefly and obscurely handled in one place are more fully and clearly explained in other places; and, therefore, when we would find out the true sense of Scripture, we must compare one passage with another, that they may illustrate one another; and we must never affix a sense to any particular text! but such as is agreeable to "the analogy of faith, or the general scheme of divine truth. The compilers of the Confession affirm, that the sense of Scripture is not manifold, but one. No doubt, many passages of Scripture have a complex meaning,—as some prophecies have several steps of fulfilment, in the Jewish nation, the Christian Church, and the heavenly state, and some passages have one thing that is typical of another. Yet these only make up that one and entire sense intended by the Holy Ghost. No Scripture can have two or more meanings properly different, and nowise subordinate one to another, because of the unity of truth, and because of the perspicuity of the Scripture.

4. That the Scriptures are the supreme standard of religious truth, is asserted in opposition to the Socinians, who maintain that reason is the standard by which we are to judge of the doctrines of revelation, and that we are bound to receive nothing as true which reason does not comprehend. There is, no doubt, much use for the exercise of reason in matters of religion; but, it may be remarked, "that the office of reason, in reference to a revelation, is not to discuss its contents, to try them by its own standard, and to approve or disapprove, as they agree or disagree with it; for this would be to treat it as if it were not a revelation, at the moment when we acknowledge it to be such; or to insinuate that the Word of God, although known to be his Word, is not entitled to credit, unless it be supported by independent proof. The sole province of reason is to examine the evidence exhibited to show that it is his Word, and to investigate its meaning by rules which are used in determining the sense of any other book. These preliminaries being settled, the state of mind which a revelation demands is faith, implicit faith, to the exclusion of doubts and objections; the subjection of our understanding to the authority of God,—entire submission to the dictates of infinite wisdom. The reason is, that his testimony supplies the place of all other evidence."

That the Supreme Judge, by which all controversies in religion are to be determined, is no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture, is asserted in opposition to the Papists, who maintain that the Church is an infallible judge in religious controversies; though they do not agree among themselves whether this infallible authority resides in the Pope, or in a council, or in both together. Now, the Scripture never mentions such an infallible judge on earth. Neither Pope, nor councils, possess the properties requisite to constitute a supreme judge in controversies of religion; for they are fallible, and have often eyed, and contradicted one another. Although the Church or her ministers are the official guardians of the Scriptures, and although it belongs to them to explain and enforce the doctrines and laws contained in the Word of God, yet their authority is only ministerial, and their interpretations and decisions are binding on the conscience only in so far as they accord with the mind of the Spirit in the Scriptures. By this test, the decisions of councils, the opinions of ancient writers, and the doctrines of men at the present time, are to be tried, and by this rule all controversies in religion must be determined. Isa. viii. 20; Matt. xxii. 29.