

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

A

S E R M O N,

DELIVERED AT THE

ORDINATION

OF THE

Rev. JESSE APPLETON,

TO THE PASTORAL CARE OF THE

CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY,

IN

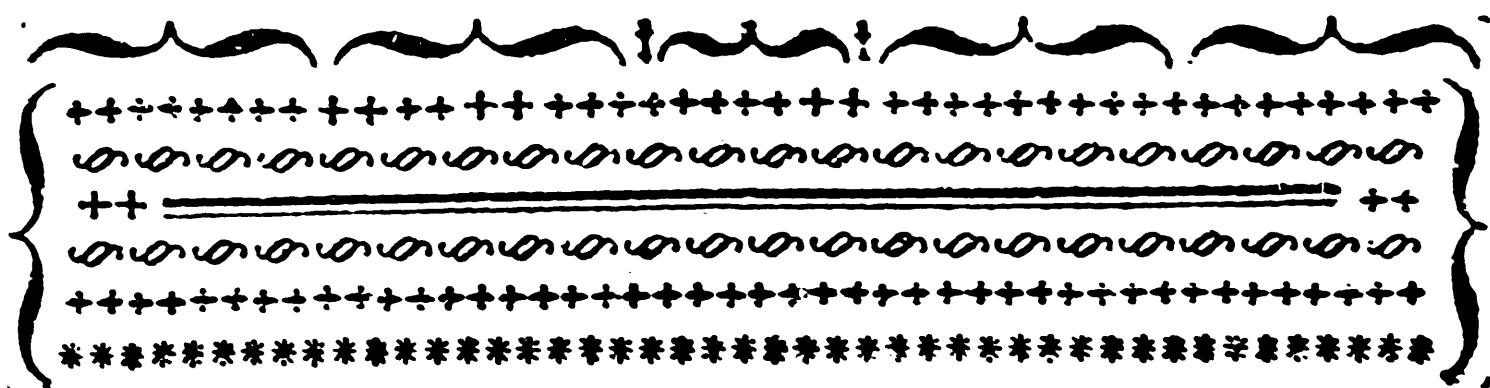
H A M P T O N,

FEBRUARY 22d, 1797.

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PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN GREENLAND.

PRINTED AT THE ORACLE-PRESS, IN PORTSMOUTH, N. H.
BY CHARLES PEIRCE.

1797.



AN
ORDINATION SERMON, &c.

ACTS ii. 22.

Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God amongst you, by miracles and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you.

IT is highly incumbent on christians, and more especially ministers, who are set for the defence of the gospel, to be well acquainted with the evidences on which its divine truth and authority are founded, that so they may be ready to give a reason to those who may ask why they believe the scriptures to be the word of God and hope for salvation by Jesus Christ Son. And it is more necessary at the present day, when deism, which has overspread all the nations of Europe, is rapidly making advances and gaining ground in this land.

While some, by substituting a spurious gospel in the room of the true, have changed its glory, or by the reveries of a blind, intemperate zeal, have exposed it to ridicule ; others by their affected contempt of its professors, ministers and institutions, discover the enmity of their heart against religion itself.

The best things may be abused to the worst purposes.—Liberty of conscience in matters of religion is the unalienable right of all moral beings who must give an account of themselves and their actions to God. This liberty is now allowed to all sects and denominations : and may it never, under any pre-
text

text whatever, be infringed—at the same time we may expect that in the exercise of this liberty we shall before long see all the cavils and objections of deists against christianity, which have been so often repeated in those nations where infidelity and vice have almost banished true religion and eradicated the moral sense from the minds of men, and which have as often been confuted, advanced anew, and every mode of attack, which the subtilty of its ingenious enemies can invent, employed to sap its foundation—We may expect to be called to go over the same ground which has already been disputed with deists inch by inch, and from which they have been driven by fair argument—It may be expected that a free trade will occasion a large importation of the corruptions and vices as well as the commodities of foreign nations ; and it would not be surprising, if in a short time, Tindal, Bolingbroke, Hume and Voltaire should have more professed disciples in this land than Jesus Christ.

Now on this supposition, which is not improbable, should the christian be able to give no better reason for his faith but only that he has been taught to believe so from his infancy by his parents and instructors ; or if ministers should not be well versed in the arguments which may be urged to confute gainfayers, the most holy and divine religion, which is founded in the fullest evidence and capable of the most solid and rational defence, would be exposed to the ridicule and triumphs of its enemies, through the ignorance or weakness of its professed friends,

A discourse therefore on the evidences of christianity from the words of the text, I hope will be thought neither unreasonable nor unsuitable to the present occasion, when it is considered how necessary it is that ministers should have a full and undoubting persuasion of the divine truth and authority of the christian religion, founded on its own evidence, to animate them with a proper zeal arising from a clear conviction of its unspeakable importance, to promote its reception among men, and to enable them to set its evidence before others in such a manner, that gainfayers may be silenced, if not convinced, and believers strengthened in their faith and hope ; and so they themselves may be unto God a sweet favour of Christ both in them that are saved and in them that perish.

It

It would be unpardonable vanity to imagine that I am capable of instructing my brethren on this subject, or offering any thing new. I have rather need to be taught of them.

But I would hope from their candour to be indulged in repeating the things they already know, to stir up their pure minds, by way of remembrance.

The real christian, who has felt the transforming influence of the gospel on his own heart, is secured against the attacks of infidelity by the witness to the truth in himself ;—He has seen the glory of divine wisdom, justice, holiness and mercy in the stupendous plan of redemption ; it appears to him a scheme worthy of God. And is the wisdom of God and the power of God to his salvation. It hath delivered him from a spirit of bondage, and established in his heart that sacred peace of God which passeth knowledge. It hath subdued his worldly lusts and changed him into the divine likeness. And when together with this he takes into consideration, ‘ the internal characters of divinity impressed on the scriptures in the excellency of their doctrines, the purity of their precepts, the power of their motives, the impartial regard to truth in their narrations, and the admirable tendency of the whole to promote the highest ends, the glory of God and the good of mankind,’ it produces a full conviction that a religion, the tendency of which is to make men conformable to the nature of the deity, holy and happy, must be divine, and cannot, as its enemies would insinuate, be a cunningly devised fable.

But though this evidence, one would think might convince a fair unprejudiced mind that God is the author of our religion, yet we find it is not sufficient to satisfy the man of mere reason. And it will be acknowledged that, “ greater evidence is justly required with regard to a thing that is unusual than for a common fact.” Nor does God require us to receive any new revelation or admit the pretensions of men to an extraordinary character without proportionable evidence to support their credit and authority—evidence which will bear the strictest scrutiny, and such as the nature of the thing requires, to guard against all possibility of deception, and to demonstrate to our reason and senses that they are sent of God, and that the messages they deliver in his name are his word. Agreeably it may be observed, whenever God has commissioned

commissioned and sent persons to make a new revelation, and deliver messages to men immediately from him, they have ever been attended with undeniable attestations of divine power to their extraordinary mission and character—They have been enabled to do such mighty works as no man could do if God were not with him.

Miracles and *prophecy* are the main external evidences of christianity, in their own nature so clear and irresistible as to leave those who reject this divine religion equally inexcusable, as the manifestation of an eternal power and godhead in the works of creation, does those who deny his being.

It is demonstration—such as in the most satisfactory manner distinguishes the character of those who were sent to make this revelation from all impostors.

To enter into a minute consideration of these two grand evidences of christianity, with the endless cavils of deists, and the satisfactory answers which have been given to them, would far exceed the limits of a single discourse, as well as my ability for the task.

All I propose is only to make some observations in a general way, shewing that this evidence is sufficient to satisfy a fair and impartial mind, that Jesus Christ is the son of God, the true Messiah, and that his gospel is a revelation from heaven. This, it is apprehended, is agreeable to the purport of the text, in which, the apostle Peter, in order to awaken in the unbelieving Jews a sense of guilt, appeals to their own consciences, that Jesus Christ whom they had crucified and slain, and whose gospel they were violently opposing, was a man approved of God among them, as the prophet he had promised their fathers, like unto Moses, by the miracles, wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of them, which words, “by a usual hebraism ‘by which a variety of things of the same kind are expressed by a great many synonymous terms,’ signify in general the miraculous works which God did by Jesus Christ in the midst of that people, and which were at the same time an accomplishment of the ancient predictions concerning him, and a public attestation of heaven to his divine mission and character.

To begin with miracles—A miracle, as distinguished from common events, is an immediate, unusual display of divine power

power, producing the effect contrary to human experience and observation, and the established laws of nature, to answer purposes worthy of his infinite wisdom and goodness—either to give mankind a striking proof of his justice, holiness and sovereign power, or to confirm the authority of those who were sent to make a revelation of his mind and will to men.

In the common course of nature the divine power operates, and produces events in an uniform manner, according to certain established laws, in a miracle the same power is displayed in an unusual manner, contrary to those laws—(or, if you like Hume's definition of a miracle, it is, "a violation of a law of nature by a particular volition of the deity.")

The design of miracles is not to prove the truth of the doctrines taught in the scriptures in order to our receiving them as divine truths ; for if this were so, they would be equally necessary at all times, and in every place where the scriptures are published, which would make them nothing different from the course of nature, for, as hath been observed, the events which take place in the course of nature, are effects of the same almighty power, and were they as unusual, would strike the minds of men as powerfully with surprize and conviction as miracles would.

Therefore it would be needless to repeat such extraordinary signs, and would by no means answer their design. If the evidence arising from the concurring testimony of both friends and enemies to the facts related in the scriptures, together with their internal characters of divinity, and their visible abiding effects, are not sufficient to convince men, they would not be persuaded though one rose from the dead. Therefore we cannot suppose that an all-wise, all-perfect being who never does any thing in vain, would deviate from the established laws of nature, unless on some great occasions, and to answer ends worthy of himself—either to demonstrate his infinite superiority above all false gods, or to confirm the authority of those who were sent to deliver messages from him.

This was the case with regard to the miracles recorded in the scriptures. Those wrought by Moses were designed to give to the world who had universally fallen into idolatry, especially to the Egyptians, a striking demonstration of the supremacy of the true God above the gods they worshipped,
and

and to convince the Israelites, that Moses was commissioned from God to speak to them in his name.—In like manner the miracles wrought by Jesus Christ were designed not to prove the truth of his doctrine, which was true whether any miracles had been wrought or not, but to give undeniable evidence to the world that he was sent of God, and that his doctrine was a revelation agreeable to the divine mind and will, and ought to be received as such with reverence and humility, and consequently that those who refuse to receive it are left inexcusable.—Agreeably he appeals to the works he did as a full and sufficient confirmation of his authority as a prophet and teacher sent from God. If I bear witness of myself my witness is not true—Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth—But I have a greater witness than that of John : for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me. The works which he did were in their own nature such extraordinary displays of divine power as were fitted to rouse the attention of a careless world, and to force conviction on their minds, that he was sent of God.

And that his miracles were real facts cannot be doubted if it is considered, that had they been the tricks of an impostor we may be morally certain the eagle-eyed enemies of christianity would not have failed to detect the cheat, and deceive the world ; but neither at that time, nor in the ages immediately succeeding, did they deny those miracles to be facts—They only attempted to account for them in some other way than by the power of God—the unbelieving Jews by ascribing them to Beelzebub, and the unbelieving Gentiles to the power of magic ; by which they meant the same thing.

But the absurdity of this blasphemous imputation served only to strengthen the cause of christianity and expose the weakness and unreasonableness of its enemies ; for as those miracles were wrought to give credit to a religion the evident tendency of which is to destroy the kingdom of Satan, nothing can be more inconsistent with the known character of this enemy of all goodness, than to suppose that he would exert his power to destroy his own interest, and to promote the cause of Christ ; for as our Saviour answers the unbelieving Jews
with

with irresistible force of reason, then would Satan be divided against himself.

There could be no cheat or imposition in the miracles of Christ, for they were of such a nature, and so circumstanced, that the fraud might easily have been detected, and there were not wanting those who would greedily have seized the opportunity. "These things," says the Apostle, "were not done in a corner," like the tricks of impostors, or the pretended miracles of the Romish Church, but in the most public manner, in the open face of day, and in the presence of thousands of spectators, many of whom were inveterate enemies to Christ, and spies on his conduct—Besides, the effects were real and permanent, objects of sense, which would bear the strictest examination.

If the ignorant and superstitious multitude were ready to believe these things the rather because they appeared marvellous, yet this could not be the case with the great & learned, the rulers and rabbies among the Jews, and the philosophers among the Gentiles—They almost universally rejected him as an impostor—It was the boast of the Jews, which of the rulers have believed on him?—They surely then could not be suspected of giving credit to superstitious tales, or of being imposed on by the tricks of an impostor, to mistake fictions for realities, and yet they never denied the miracles of Christ to be facts—They could certainly know the lame were restored to the use of their limbs, the blind to sight, the sick healed, and the dead raised to life—They could certainly know whether Lazarus, who had been dead four days, was alive after he was said to be raised from the dead.

Such facts were as undeniable demonstrations of the infinite power of God giving testimony to the divine mission and character of Jesus and the truth of his religion, as the visible things of creation are of the existence of a God; for if Jesus had not been what he professed to be, the son of God, but an impostor, as his enemies insinuated, we may be sure a God of truth and holiness would not have set his seal to a lie—so that those who reject christianity may with equal reason disbelieve the being of a God.

The transition from deism to atheism is easy and natural, and the atheist can offer as good reasons for denying the exist-

ence of a Deity, as the deist can for denying the scriptures to be the word of God, and Jesus Christ his Son.

It is true, we have not been eye-witnesses of the miracles recorded in the New-Testament which were wrote to give credit to christianity, yet we have all the evidence the nature of the case will admit or we can reasonably desire, to satisfy a fair mind, equally as if we had seen them with our eyes—We have the highest degree of evidence, arising from human testimony, which is that kind of evidence on which our belief and practice in almost all cases is founded ;—so that to disbelieve the miracles wrought by Christ and his apostles, because we have not seen them ourselves, but have only the testimony of others to depend on, would lead us to disbelieve and reject every thing of which we have not been witnesses ourselves.—On this principle we must disbelieve the existence of any other countries or nations besides those we have seen, or that there have ever been any such characters, transactions and memorable events as are transmitted to us in the historic page—that any men ever have existed, or do now exist besides those we have seen, because this depends wholly on human testimony.

On this principle, criminals must be acquitted, because the only evidence on which they can be convicted is human testimony ; but this, at first view, must appear absurd and ridiculous, as it would at once put a stop to the course of justice, and to all transactions which depend on this kind of evidence and set open the flood gates of wickedness.

But if human testimony is allowed to be sufficient evidence in common affairs, yet miracles being unusual & extraordinary facts, require proportionate evidence to induce our belief. It is granted—and in such cases human testimony may be equal to demonstration, when the purposes for which such miracles were wrought are worthy of God, and the testimony on which our belief depends is attended with every mark of credibility that could reasonably be desired, which will apply with peculiar propriety to the miracles of Christ, and correspond to the sentiments of that master of reason, Mr. Locke, who says “ Though common experience and the ordinary course of things have justly a mighty influence on the minds of men, to make them give or refuse credit to any thing pro-
posed

posed to their belief, yet there is one case wherein the strangeness of the act lessens not the assent given to a fair testimony given of it. For where such supernatural events are suitable to ends aimed at by him who has the power to change the course of nature ; there, under such circumstances, they may be the fitter to procure belief by how much the more they are contrary to common observation. This is the proper case of *miracles*, which well attested, do not only find credit themselves, but give it also to other truths which need such a confirmation." And surely it cannot be denied that the miracles of Christ are suitable to the ends aimed at by him who has the power to change the course of nature, and that the testimony on which our belief of the facts depends is attended with every mark of credibility which could reasonably be required.

This will appear with fuller evidence if we take a brief view of the grand event which is the foundation of christianity and of the faith and hope of all who believe in Christ, *his resurrection from the dead*. For as the apostle reasons, if Christ be not risen then is our preaching vain, and your faith also is vain ; ye are yet in your sins—If he were not able to deliver himself from the power of death, he cannot deliver those who trust in him, nor realize their hopes of eternal life which are founded on his power and merit.

But if he is actually risen, this is a demonstration that he is the son of God and able to deliver those who trust in him from the power of death—agreeably to which he himself suspended the truth of his divine character on this as the last sign he would give the unbelieving Jews. He constantly claimed the high character of the Son of God, and they as constantly denied it—and after they had rejected all the supernatural evidence he had given them, the controversy was put on this issue as the last sign he would give that generation, that he would rise from the dead on the third day after his crucifixion. This was to determine whether he was the son of God—if he should rise as he had foretold, this would establish his claim and decide the controversy——Aware of the consequence, the Jews took every precaution in their power to guard against the disciples stealing him away by night, and imposing on the credulity of the multitude by pretending that he was risen. To this end they secured the sepulchre where

where the body was deposited in the best manner possible, by sealing the stone and setting a strong guard at the only avenue to it—Now we have a particular account given by all the four evangelists that Jesus rose on the third day as he had foretold, and of the extraordinary circumstances which attended that event.

The question then is whether their account is attended with such marks of credibility as may satisfy a fair mind that it is true—In order to this, let us consider the following things.

1. His disciples constantly testified in the most public manner, and in the face of the greatest opposition, that he was risen, and that they had seen and conversed with him after his resurrection, and this was generally believed among the people.

2. The body was missing out of the sepulchre. This could not be denied; otherwise the Jews by producing it could easily have confuted the report. But they did not pretend to deny it. The method they took to frustrate the effect it might have on the minds of the multitude was to bribe the soldiers, who watched the sepulchre, to say that his disciples stole him away, while they were asleep—a contrivance so weak and ridiculous that with every reasonable man it must confirm, rather than invalidate, the testimony of the witnesses; for how could the soldiers know, or be witnesses of what passed while, by their own concession, they were asleep.

Besides; is it not incredible to suppose that the whole guard were fallen into such a profound sleep that not one of them should be awaked by the alarming circumstances which attended the event, especially as they were placed so near the door of the sepulchre?

And had it really been so that the disciples stole away the body by night, is it not incredible, that men upon such a design, when they must know that immediate death must be their fate, in case of being detected by the guard, should have proceeded with such cool deliberation as to take off the linen clothes in which the body was wrapped, and lay them aside in the sepulchre?

3. There was a variety of witnesses to the event—the women who came early to the sepulchre, and to whom he first appeared—to several of the disciples at different times—to all of them when assembled together, and to five hundred brethren at one time. Now it is incredible that so many persons,

sons, at such different times, could all be so much deceived as to mistake the illusions of fancy for a reality ; or that they could not be certain whether the person they saw and repeatedly conversed with was that same Jesus with whom they had been so intimately acquainted while he was alive.

It may be added,

4. That the apostles, the authorised witnesses of this grand fact, had all the qualifications which even the enemies of christianity themselves make necessary to entitle their testimony to full faith and credit.

The number was not only sufficient, but they were eye and ear witnesses of the things they attest. They had been the constant attendants of the Lord Jesus—had gone in and out with him while he was alive—had been admitted to the intimacies of friendship with him—had heard his discourses, seen his miracles, and repeatedly seen and conversed with him after his resurrection. And though it is true they were not men of learning, yet from their writings it appears they were men of good sense and integrity, qualifications in witnesses of far greater importance than learning to give credibility to their testimony.—Their narrations carry in them all the appearance of godly sincerity—They appear like a number of plain, sensible, honest men giving their evidence in the fear of God without any art, disguise or colouring.

Had they been men of great learning and delivered their testimony in a laboured stile, and with a studied eloquence, it might have created a suspicion of some sinister design, and undoubtedly would have been made a greater handle of against christianity than their want of learning is now.

It may farther be observed that so far were they from being credulous, that they could not be brought to believe that Jesus was actually risen till they “ were constrained by the testimony of all their senses.”——Nor could they justly be suspected of selfish views in giving their testimony ; had they been encouraged to expect worldly riches, honour and power in the kingdom of Christ, or had their scheme of religion been suited to the carnal notions and prejudices of the unbelieving Jews, their patience and perseverance under their sufferings might easily be accounted for—But whatever hopes of this kind they might entertain while their divine master was alive, it is evident they had no expectations of any worldly advantages

tages by professing themselves his disciples after his resurrection and the descent of the spirit on the day of pentecost.—He had taught them that his kingdom was not of this world—He had forbid them to seek great things for themselves, and forewarned them to expect to suffer tribulation in this world for his sake ; and experience soon verified the truth of his predictions—they found that bonds and imprisonment awaited them wherever they went, and that they were counted and treated as the filth of the world.

All the powers of darkness were combined against them, and they were called to sacrifice their ease and reputation, and every worldly interest for the sake of Christ : And indeed what else could they expect from professing themselves the disciples of one who made such a contemptible figure in the eyes of the world, and who suffered an ignominious death on a cross ?

Now is it not reasonable to conclude that their unshaken constancy amidst such discouragements, in bearing witness to the resurrection of Jesus could proceed from nothing short of the fullest conviction of the truth and importance of the fact they attested.

To this may be added they were themselves enabled to do many wonderful works in his name ; and though they were destitute of all worldly advantages, and the religion they preached is opposite to the reigning prejudices and vices of mankind, yet it was attended with such surprizing success that in a short time it overturned the fabric of superstition, which was supported by all the civil powers of the earth, and turned multitudes from their idols to serve the living God, without the aid of carnal weapons.

This evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, the grand fact on which christianity depends, taken all together, as one justly observes, “ forms such a concatenation of proofs as is every way suitable to the importance of the fact, and which was never equalled in any other case. And to suppose all this evidence to have been given in attestation to a falsehood, involveth in it the most palpable absurdities. It is to suppose, either that God would employ his own prescience and power to give testimony to an impostor, by a series of the most illustrious prophecies and numerous uncontrouled miracles : or, that good beings, superior to man, would extraordinarily in-

terpose

terpose for the same purpose, to countenance and derive credit to a person falsely pretending to be sent from God, and feigning to act in his name : or that evil spirits would use all their arts and power to attest and confirm a religion, the manifest tendency of which was to destroy idolatry, superstition and vice, wherever it was sincerely believed and embraced, and to recover mankind to holiness and happiness ; which is a contradiction to their very nature and character. It is to suppose that a number of persons would combine in attesting falsehoods in favor of a person who they knew had deceived them, and of a religion contrary to their most inveterate and favorite prejudices, and by which they had a prospect of gaining nothing but misery, reproach, sufferings and death ; which is absolutely contrary to all the principles and passions of the human nature : It is to suppose that persons of the greatest simplicity and plainness would act the part of the vilest impostors : or that men that were so bad, so false and impious, as to be capable of carrying on a series of the most solemn impositions in the name of God himself, would, at the hazard of all that is dear to men, and in manifest opposition to all their worldly interests, endeavour to bring over the nations to embrace a holy and self-denying institution : or, that if they were enthusiasts, who were carried away with the heat of their own distempered brains to imagine that for a series of years together the most extraordinary facts were done before their eyes, though no such things were done at all, and that they were themselves enabled actually to perform the most wonderful works, in the most open and public manner, tho' they performed no such works ; it is to suppose that such mad enthusiasts, who were also mean and contemptible in their condition, and for the most part ignorant and illiterate, were not only capable of forming the noblest scheme of religion that was ever published to mankind, but were able to overcome all the learning, wealth, power, eloquence of the world, all the bigotry and superstition of the nations, all the influence and artifices of the priests, all the power and authority of the magistrates : That they did this by only alledging that they had a commission in the name of a person who had been crucified, whom they affirmed, but without giving any proof of it, to have been risen from the dead and to be exalted as the Saviour and Lord of mankind. All this is such a complication

complication of absurdities, as cannot be admitted but upon principles that are absolutely abhorrent to the common sense and reason of men."

I have dwelt so long on this head that the time will allow me only to take a brief view of the next grand external evidence of the christian religion, which is *prophecy*—the prediction of events that were future, and of which none but an omniscient being could have a certain foreknowledge : For though Satan, by means of his large capacity and long experience of the course of events, might be able in many cases to make a probable conjecture what the consequence would be of a particular conjunction of circumstances, yet he could have no certain foreknowledge of the event. Agreeably it may be observed, that the responses given from the heathen Oracles by the evil spirit were generally conceived in ambiguous terms to save the reputation of the Oracle let the event be what it might ; but the predictions in the sacred Oracles are so determinate in describing the events to which they refer, as plainly shews that he alone who sees through all futurity was the author of them—The prophets are so circumstantial in their descriptions, that it would rather seem as if they were giving the history of things past than foretelling things to come, and yet many events were not only at a great distance of time but in their own nature so contrary to human experience and observation, that there was not the least probability, at the time, that they ever would come to pass.

Who but an omniscient being to whom the whole chain of causes and events are present in one view from all eternity, could have foretold so long before, that the posterity of Abram should be strangers in a land that was not their's, and should serve them, and that they should afflict them, and afterward they should come out with great substance, and possess that land in which he was then a sojourner ?—That the posterity of Ishmael by the bond woman, should dwell in the presence of his brethren, or be always a free people, which has been most literally verified, in a remarkable manner in the Arabians; his posterity, who are almost the only nation on earth who in all ages have maintained their natural liberty in spite of all attempts to enslave them ? How remarkable is the prediction of the captivity of the Jews in Babylon ! The precise term is prefixed, seventy years shall they serve the
King

King of Babylon. Cyrus, who was appointed to be the instrument of their deliverance, is mentioned by name near two hundred years before he was born ; and the manner in which he should take Babylon, circumstantially described—agreeably to which, after he had taken that strong, and, in a human view, impregnable city, and executed the vengeance of heaven on her proud monarch, he published the edict for rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple, and the returning of the Jews to their own land—Nor is the prophecy of Daniel respecting Alexander, and the partition of his empire among his four successors, less to the purpose.—We can never (says the excellent Mr. Rollin) sufficiently admire the strong light with which the prophet penetrates the thick gloom of futurity, at a time when there was not the least appearance of all he foretells. With how much certainty and exactness, even amidst the variety of those revolutions, and a chaos of singular events, does he determine each particular circumstance, and fix the number of the several successors ! How expressly has he pointed out their nation, that was to be the Grecian ; described the countries they were to possess ; measured the duration of their empires, and the extent of their power, inferior to that of Alexander ; in a word, with what lively colours has he drawn the characters of those princes, and specified their alliances, treaties, treachery, marriages, and success ! Can any one possibly ascribe to chance, or human foresight, so many circumstantial predictions, which, at the time of their being denounced, were so remote from probability ; and may we not evidently discover in them the characters and traces of the divinity, to whom all ages are present in one view, and who alone determines at his will the fate of all the kingdoms and empires of the world ?”

Many of the predictions immediately relating to the Messiah are as circumstantial, as if they were a history of a past event, though they were, many of them, given thousands of years before his incarnation.

The particular tribe and family from which he should descend—The signs of the time when he should appear—The place of his nativity—Bethlehem—The manner of his birth—The wonderful works he should do to prove his divine mission and character.—The kind, manner and precise time of his death, at the expiration of Daniel’s seventy prophetic weeks,

or four hundred and ninety years from the going forth of the forementioned commandment of Cyrus.

The person who should betray him, one of his familiar friends—The price for which he should be betrayed ; thirty pieces of silver—The use to which that money should be applied—to buy the potter's field.—His resurrection from the dead before he should see corruption—His triumphant ascension to glory.

The effusion of the spirit in miraculous gifts on his disciples—The general spread of his religion in the world, and reformation from vice and idolatry without coercive measures.

To this may be added the predictions given by Christ himself while he was alive, and by his spirit speaking in his apostles, which have been fulfilled at different periods, in such a circumstantial manner and so exactly corresponding to the predictions, as fully evinces that they must have been founded in a knowledge of futurity which surpasses the comprehension of any finite intelligence—Such as the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple, and Jewish polity by the Romans, and the tragical scenes attending that awful catastrophe—The dispersion of the Jews over the face of the earth for rejecting Christ and his gospel, and their retaining their distinct national character 'till the deliverer should come out of Zion to turn away ungodliness from Jacob—Agreeably to that remarkable prediction respecting this event, I will make an end of all nations, &c.—The rise, progress, and appearance of the antichristian power, and its gradual declension and final ruin. The state of religion and of the christian church at different periods of time under the emblem of the seven Asiatic churches—The events of time have hitherto answered to these and other predictions of the New Testament, as face answers to face in a glass, which is a standing, additional confirmation of the truth of christianity, as the apostle John says, the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus—The spirit speaking in these prophecies, bears witness to his divine character and the truth of his religion by their exact accomplishment through every period of time.

From what hath been said the christian may derive a ready answer to every one who asks a reason of the hope that is in him.

He may say, I am sure the religion I profess is divine, because it hath been made the wisdom of God and the power of
God

God to my salvation—because its whole constitution appears conformable to the divine character and perfections ; and the manifest tendency of all its doctrines, precepts, promises and threatnings is to promote holiness ; and because God himself hath given abundant attestations to its divine truth and authority by his omniscience and infinite power, in the numerous predictions of events which could have been known to him alone, and which have been exactly accomplished in the different periods of time, and in the wonderful works done by Christ and his apostles ; such as no man could have done if God had not been with him—and I am sure the witnesses who were chosen to testify the grand fact, which is the foundation of my faith and hope, *the resurrection of Jesus*, could not be deceived themselves, nor have any design to deceive others, and that a God of infinite holiness would not have enabled them to do such wonderful works, to confirm their testimony, and derive credit to the religion they published, had they been false witnesses—In this fact I have the highest assurance of the final accomplishment of all the exceeding great & precious promises made to the heirs of salvation—I hope for eternal life through Jesus Christ, because he is risen and glorified, and hath promised those who believe in him shall be delivered from the power of death, and be glorified together with him—On this fact, thus attested, my faith & hope stand secure, like a house built on a rock, against all the assaults of sin and hell.

If Jesus Christ was commissioned and sent of God into the world to accomplish the work of redemption, and to make that revelation of his mind and will to mankind which is contained in the New-Testament, and if in the truths he taught, and the ordinances he hath instituted in his Church, he spake and acted by authority derived immediately from God, it necessarily follows that the ministry of the gospel which he hath instituted in his church to subserve the grand design of his mediatorial kingdom, is an ordinance of heaven, and that ministers derive their authority to preach the word and dispense the seals and censures of the new covenant from him, and so are in a peculiar sense his servants and accountable to him for the management of the sacred trust committed to them.

In this view, dear brother, animated with holy zeal, you will feel yourself engaged to diligence and fidelity, in the duties of the ministerial work among this beloved people presently

fently to be committed to your pastoral care. Under a solemn sense of the weight and importance of this work, you will take heed to the ministry you have received in the Lord, that you fulfil it, so as to give up your account with joy.—How arduous the work ! How many and great the difficulties attending it ! How solemn the account ! Well may the thought cause us to tremble.

But my Brother, while with the great apostle, under a sense of the labours, trials and temptations attending this work, of which you have had some experience, and the wisdom, prudence, and diligence requisite to discharge the duties of it in such a manner as to be accepted of God both in them that are saved and in them that perish, you are ready to cry out, who is sufficient for these things ? You have at the same time abundant encouragement to counterballance the greatest difficulties, in that promise, on which he hath caused you to trust, my grace shall be sufficient for thee. Experience hath taught you that he who hath promised is faithful. Hitherto he has supported and strengthened you under all your trials, and still he is able to cause all grace to abound unto you ; and while you continue faithful in his cause, you may assuredly expect that your strength shall be according to your day, for he sendeth none a warfare any time, at his own charges.

Therefore, relying on his faithful promise, and all-sufficient grace, animated by the hope of eternal glory, you will be unwearied in your labours, patient under tribulation, and courageous in opposing the current of vice and infidelity.

Fully persuaded of the truth of the gospel by the irresistible evidence with which it is confirmed, and the sovereign power by which it has been effectual to your salvation, far from being ashamed of it, or moved away from the glorious hope it sets before you, by the temptations of an ensnaring world, or the sneers and ridicule of the profane wittlings of a dissipated age ; you will rather glory in the name of a christian, especially of a christian minister, as the highest stile of man, while you consider the gospel as exhibiting the brightest display of all the divine glories, and designed to raise men to the highest dignity and happiness of which the human nature is capable, and the work of the ministry the most noble and benevolent in which men or angels could be employed.

It is enough my brother, to animate you to the most vigorous

gorous efforts in this work, that he who hath called you to it, hath said, be thou faithful unto the death and I will give thee a crown of life. Let us not be weary nor faint in our minds, for if we faint not we shall in due time reap.—We shall hear from the lips of our Lord and Judge that plaudit more to be desired than the applauses of the universe, *well done good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.* The Lord grant that we may obtain mercy of the Lord to be faithful so as to be approved and accepted of him at that awful and glorious day.

Beloved brethren of this ancient christian society, we salute you much in the Lord, and rejoice with you, that when you had been left, by the decease of your worthy excellent Pastor, as sheep without a shepherd, you have been led by the all-disposing providence of God to the unanimous choice of a successor, who we have every reason to think will approve himself to your consciences in the sight of God a good minister of Jesus Christ, by diligence and fidelity in all the various duties of the sacred office, and being an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

You will therefore receive him with gratitude and joy as a precious gift of the ascended saviour, and do every thing in your power to encourage and animate him in the work in which he is engaged, not only by attending constantly on his ministry, but uniting your endeavors with his that the great, the important end of his ministry may be accomplished in the salvation of men, and the edification of the church of Christ in faith, love and holiness—While he ministers to you spiritual things, which are of infinite importance, you will not be backward to minister to him of your carnal things for his temporal subsistence, that he may have his time and labours to devote to the work of the ministry he has received of the Lord for your spiritual edification.

While he comes to you in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ, you will be ready to say, from hearts filled with gratitude to God, how beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things ! While he bears you on his heart at the throne of grace, you will strive together with him in your prayers that he may not run in vain, nor labor in vain, but that the

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word of the Lord may prosper in his hands, and accomplish the thing unto which it is appointed. While he exercises the discipline of Christ in his church, you will not despise him that reproveth in the gate, but submit to him in the Lord as to one who knows that he must give an account.

The greatest encouragement of a minister who has religion at heart, is to see the visible success of the gospel among those to whom he ministers ; to see them forsaking their sins, turning to God and walking in the truth ; in conformity to the character of God in Christ, and in obedience to his commands. The end of the gospel dispensation is no further answered than as it produces these effects. Without this the highest profession is a lye, and the most elevated joys a delusion, for the design of all that Christ hath done and suffered, and the tendency and effect of his gospel in all who receive it in the love of it, is to recover them from their apostate state to a conformity and obedience to those two great commands, Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself, which are the essential laws of his moral Kingdom—If you are conformed by the grace of God to these commands, you will guard against the exercise of that malignant censorious disposition towards those who differ from you, which in all ages has been the reproach and scandal of our holy religion, and cultivate a spirit of peace and charity towards all who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus, though they may differ from you in some speculative opinions, or modes and forms of worship which are not essential to religion, readily allowing to them the same exercise of private judgment in matters of religion which you claim as your natural right, and charitably believing that they are conscientious in those things wherein they differ.—By thus cultivating a temper of peace and love, you will attain the nearest resemblance of that most benevolent being whose nature is love, and a meetness for the harmonious society above, where all their songs are one, and a pure and perfect charity is the bond of an everlasting friendship.

Finally, if the character and mission of Jesus Christ as the son of God and man, have been confirmed by such signs and miracles as are undeniable proofs of divine almighty power, this shews the heinous guilt, impiety and madness of those who reject his gospel, and treat his institutions with practical contempt. By disbelieving the record God hath given of his
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son, though confirmed by such public attestations, they make God a liar ; by despising those who are authorized according to his institution to preach the gospel, they despise not man but God ; and by wilfully shutting their eyes against the clear convincing evidence which attends this revelation from heaven, they do what in them lies to frustrate the benevolent design of almighty grace, and are in the utmost danger of committing that sin which shall never be forgiven. This ought to be an alarming consideration to those who deny the miracles wrought by Jesus Christ, and particularly by his apostles, after the gift of the spirit, in confirmation of christianity, to be effects of the immediate power of God, and account for them by other causes ; for it is to be observed, that it is of the unbelieving Jews, who ascribed the miracles he wrought to satanical influence, that Jesus Christ is speaking, when he solemnly forewarns them that this blasphemous imputation should never have forgiveness : Because they said, He hath a devil. This I think, is the true, scripture idea of the unpardonable sin ; and the only sin that is unpardonable.

Not that the demerit of this sin exceeds the mercy of God, or the merits of the redeemer, but its being unpardonable arises from the peculiar nature of the sin itself : For as those who are guilty of this sin, do wilfully, against the clearest evidence could be given, reject the only remedy a merciful God hath provided, and revealed in the gospel, for the recovery of a revolted world to his favor, through the mediation of his son, and the atonement in his blood, by this they exclude themselves from the hope of mercy and forgiveness on the plan of grace revealed in the gospel, and are left on the footing of the law of works, which demands sinless obedience as the condition of a title to life.—Such therefore cannot be profited by what Christ hath done any more than if he had not died.—To them there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgement.

It were to be wished that those who consider the christian religion as a contrivance of human wisdom to serve political purposes, and who treat the miracles recorded in the New Testament, which were wrought in attestation of the divine mission and character of the author of this religion, with an air of ridicule, would seriously consider their guilt and danger before the door of mercy & of hope shall be forever shut against them.

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If the unbelieving Jews would have had, comparatively, no sin, had not Christ come and spoken to them, and done such mighty works in the midst of them, how aggravated, beyond expression, is the guilt of unbelievers at the present day, by the full and clear revelation God hath made of his mind and will in the writings of the inspired Apostles, and the additional confirmation of christianity in the accomplishment of predictions thro' every succeeding period of time since !—And how dreadful the condemnation which awaits such at that great and terrible day of the Lord, when he shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire to take vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ !—Let such attend with fear and trembling to that alarming admonition of the apostle to the Hebrews. For if we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment—and ;—If he that despised Moses's law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses, of how much sorer punishment suppose ye shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the spirit of grace ? O, be persuaded to kiss the son lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, submit to his gospel & government before he shall come forth in his righteous vengeance to tear you to pieces, when there shall be none able to deliver you out of his hand ; for if he means as he speaks, and will do as he hath spoken, all the curses of his violated law, and the more dreadful condemnation of the gospel, shall be executed on those, who by their carnal reasonings are endeavouring to sap the foundation of christianity, or by their ungodly lives are violating its sacred precepts, and exposing it to open dishonor, and who shall finally continue in their unbelief and impenitence. On the other hand, those who with their heart believe and obey the gospel ; who love & fear God and hope in his mercy, may be equally certain that all his promises, which in Christ are yea and amen, shall be fulfilled to them in their utmost extent & meaning.—That all things shall work together for their good, and that they shall finally be delivered from the power of death, and from all evil, and in their compleat persons be glorified with their divine redeemer in the kingdom of God above, where there is fulness of joy forevermore.

AMEN.