

LETTERS

TO

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THOMAS PAINE,

IN REPLY TO HIS LAST PAMPHLET,

ENTITLED

*“Examination of the Passages in the New Testament,
quoted from the Old, and called Prophecies
concerning Jesus Christ.”*

AND SHEWING

THE FALLACY AND INCOMPETENCY

OF

DEISM,

AS A RULE FOR THE REGULATION OF

HUMAN CONDUCT.

By PETER R. MAISON.

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PREFACE.

IT has been said by men who were well acquainted with human nature, that when an opinion is offered to the world on any important subject, that may have a tendency to warp or seduce the judgment to an erroneous conclusion, it should always be met by an immediate exposure of its fallacy, and disarmed of its noxious and delusive qualities. Mr. Paine's last production, purporting to be an examination of the Prophecies, quoted in support of the advent of the Messiah, lately fell into my hands, I waited with some anxiety for a reply from some learned ecclesiastic, to render harmless the specious ingenuity of that great man's exuberant fancy; but hitherto nothing has appeared to check its unfavourable influence, or even to apprise the world that Mr. Paine might possibly expound the prophecies incorrectly.

It will not do to say, that his former works on the same subject were so completely sifted and exposed, as to render a refutation of his subsequent effusions unnecessary; we never hear a person in a paroxysm of the ague, justify a present neglect of medicine by a successful application made some twelve months since, for the same disorder. Every year ushers on the stage a new generation of readers, and every attempt to undermine the great pillars of our liberty or our religion, should be promptly exposed and resisted.

It may be deemed presumptuous however, in a *Lay strifling* to take the field against such a literary Goliath, whose acumen and celebrity are sufficient to appal the resolution of a veteran in controversy; yet an opposition to the invasion of our rights, though feeble, is entitled to a softer epithet than rashness; *to die in the*

last ditch in support of the source of all our comfort and consolation, justly demands a degree of approbation. I do not calculate however to figure in the combat like a Bonaparté or a Cæsar, but merely to perform well the subaltern duties of the loyal and the animated soldier.

Mr. Paine's last work contains nothing novel or striking; a mere collection of old matter modernized by harsh epithets and bold assertions need only be stript of its gauze and its tinsel, to bring it within the purlieus of its former standing.

Infidelity is the bane of human enjoyment. When a man has embraced a system intrinsically beautiful, on which he reposes his future safety, and through the influence of which he contemplates with complacency, the destiny of himself and his nearest and dearest connections, which reconciles him to the occasional privations and mishaps of the present world, and fixes his hopes of immortality on a world to come; when in this state of confidence and self-approbation, the rude storm of unbelief assails him, and sweeps from beneath his feet the anchor ground of his faith in future bliss, alas! how deplorable the transition from content and peace of mind, to the agitations of doubt, and distrust, and despair.

Mr. Paine little thinks what perplexity and misery, what half-formed hopes and agonizing fears, his works have given rise to; his humanity would revolt at the baneful consequences of his irreligious labours, were he fully apprized of their mischievous and hurtful tendencies. But when the human mind is indulged in a passion for distinction and fame, every other consideration is swallowed up in its perpetual and boundless cravings; and the pain and unhappiness our vanity and ambition has excited in others, never once occurs to our reflection till we are apprized that new and untried scenes are shortly to arrest our attention.

If a perusal of the following letters should have the happy effect of convincing any one of the inutility and fallacy of the system of Deism, and which Mr. Paine more than any one endeavours to diffuse through the world, I shall esteem myself amply remunerated for the time I have devoted to the subject; and to avoid the charge of plagiarism which ill-nature might prefer for the want of more important and weighty objections, I do once for all allow, that I have adopted many appropriate ideas, I found in such authors as

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I happened to have by me. Indeed Mr. Paine's doctrine has been so repeatedly and satisfactorily refuted, that to every new publication of cavilling and disbelieving, it is only necessary to present some of the numerous arguments that have often been adduced, in a shape and model suitable to meet the existing shape of the objections.

I trust that in our country there are but few who disbelieve the tenents and dictates of Christianity. Those who have read for themselves with candour, and a willingness to take facts for truth, where competent testimony would warrant the conclusion, are in no danger of being misled by the sophistry of the preachers of infidelity; but the bulk of mankind are not such as can or will divest themselves of improper influence; and read and think on the fair principles of light and reason. To such therefore as are subject to the giddy influence of Mr. Paine's artful and imposing speculations, I would recommend the train of reasoning I have attempted to oppose to his opinions.

Poughkeepsie, October, 1807.

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Letters to Thomas Paine.

LETTER I.

INTRODUCTORY AND MISCELLANEOUS.

SIR,

I HAVE read with attention, your last work, entitled "Examination of the passages in the New Testament, quoted from the Old, and called Prophecies concerning Jesus Christ." I say I have read it with attention, because, from the talents and ingenuity displayed in your political works, and the happy effects they produced, in nerving the arm of an insulted people about to throw off the shackles of political bondage, I, in common with a great portion of my countrymen, was in the habit of thinking highly of your genius and acquired knowledge.

It is true, your "Age of Reason" had a tendency to damp the admiration your former works had procured you, but your peculiar situation in France, and the necessity you was under of ingratiating yourself in the good graces of an abandoned and profligate government, which was urged by some of your friends in extenuation, had a considerable effect in removing the unfavourable impressions excited against you by that publication. But now, when you are enjoying the most perfect liberty and safety, and under no dire necessity of sacrificing at the shrine of any political Moloch, it is extremely mortifying to your friends, that your fine talents, which under proper directions, are capable of rendering mankind such essential services, should be suffered to pursue the erratic course of crude and empty speculation; which, at best, is not calculated to conciliate the

favour of God, nor to promote the virtue and happiness of man. I suspect, sir, that inasmuch as your active mind has been so incessantly engaged in promoting the political freedom and happiness of your fellow men, you have not had leisure sufficient for that due deliberation and intensity of thought on the subject of Religion and Morality, of which you are so capable, if the subject could engage your undivided attention. I have, therefore, taken the liberty of offering for your consideration, some new materials, or rather some old ones perhaps in a new light, which I know no man can make better use of than yourself; and as I believe that truth is your object, and that you will embrace it with eagerness, under whatever form it may be found, I have the fullest confidence that you will exercise that patience and candour towards me, that never fails to distinguish the man of genius and the gentleman; and that if hereafter you should entertain any suspicion that error might lurk, *half seen*, in some corner of your present favourite system of Deism, you will openly detect and expose the delusion, and with your wonted indignation at fraud and imposture, with one stroke fall the monster to the ground. The trifling consideration of pride of opinion, I am persuaded, will not restrain you from acknowledging an error as soon as you discover it; great minds are not shackled by little things.

As a champion of truth, you will publicly hail the goddess and legitimize the wanderer, if you should fortunately recognize her in the beautiful, the benevolent, and the truly philosophic system of the christian religion. Such a recognition would be a glorious triumph for truth and christianity, in which *Thomas Paine* would not be degraded.—No, Fame's brazen trump would proclaim the glad tidings over our wide-extended country—the revival of public gratitude and esteem would sweeten and console the remaining years of a useful life—a self approbation and a certainty of a happy immortality would enlighten the dreary passage from life

to eternity, and dispel the gloom and uncertainty of Deism, when about to be tested at the bar of eternal truth and justice.



LETTER II.

A REVELATION FROM GOD TO MAN, WAS NECESSARY, IN A MANNER SUITABLE TO HIS POWERS OF PERCEPTION.

SIR,

IT is impossible for us to tell what would be the opinions and reflections of mankind, if they were suddenly ushered into the world with minds capacitated for immediate reflection, and reason and judgment ripened to useful maturity. But we do know that in the ordinary course of nature, men grow up from childhood, familiarized to all the objects of the senses. They behold the regularity of the heavenly bodies, the uniformity and succession of the seasons, and their various effects on the animal and vegetable world without emotions of wonder, or much curiosity concerning the cause of effects that are constantly exhibited before them.

When the intellectual powers of men begin to unfold, their first exertions are directed to the acquisition of the necessary articles of life. The construction of houses or boats; the conversion of the spontaneous products of nature to the most useful purposes; the reproduction of such articles as become indispensable by culture and propagation, are pursuits that primarily engross their whole attention. Genius commences its operations in ascertaining the natures and dispositions of the different species of birds and quadrupeds, with a view of accumulating such property with greater facility. Necessaries secured beyond the danger of want, a spi-

rit of improvement and a taste for multiplying the means of enjoyment developes new objects of desire and attainment, and the phenomena of nature inspire the expanded mind with a desire to scrutinize the causes of effects, that till then had passed without much observation or concern. But the human understanding not being able to discover the principles of nature, nor the relation between causes and effects, whose causes were not within the cognizance of the senses, it was impossible that they could rise from the contemplation of sensible objects to a discovery of insensible causes, and form any conception of a supreme being as creator and governor of the Universe.

The construction of the human mind is such, that it is utterly incapable of conceiving an idea of infinity; it is through the senses only that we are informed of the existence of things. When men look around, they *see* the various objects of trees, animals, earth and water; they *hear* the singing of birds, the talking of men, the whistling of winds, and the roaring of thunder; they *smell* the fragrance of the blossom and the rose, and all the mingling perfumes of a variegated vegetation; they *feel* the genial influence of the warming sun, and the cooling breeze; and they *taste* the bounty and luxuriance nature has every where strewed around. Surrounded by these various objects which irresistibly excite the attention, they each and separately convey distinct impression to the mind through the organs adapted for such conveyance. Trees of different heights, animals of different shapes, sounds of different tones, and smells and sensations of different kinds, convey impressions of variety and multiplicity; and these first impressions, excited by the immediate operation of these objects on the senses, it is, what we distinguish by the name of *simple ideas*. Hence we can have no idea of light and colours without seeing; we could not possibly conceive in what mode such things existed; we can have no idea of the sound of music, of thunder or any other noise,

without hearing; it could in no way enter our minds what they were like; we can have no idea of sweet or sour, of fragrance or fetor, of hardness or softness, without the power of tasting, of smelling, and feeling; these properties would be as remote from our conceptions, as the existence of any thing we never have, nor ever will hear or see.

Ideas thus introduced to the mind through the organs of the senses, are combined, and divided, and compared, which arranging and distributing again, excites a new set of impressions which we denominate *compound ideas*; and this faculty of noticing and comparing the variety of impressions as they flow in succession to the mind, it is, what we mean by *perception*. Thus the impressions on the senses awakens the power of perception, which arranges them in bodies and classes, develops their various powers and qualities by comparison, and ascertains their agreement or variance from their observable qualities and tendencies, which nicety of comparison, and accuracy of classing, we mean by *judgment* and *observation*. The extent and variety of which these combinations are susceptible, are sufficient to employ all the powers of the human intellect, and furnish it with matter for the various opinions, fancies and views of things, that make up the subjects we call *reason* and *contemplation*. But in all this arrangement and combination of ideas conveyed through the senses, and we can get no ideas any other way, the finite mind is only equal to the conception of finite things. The conception of an infinite being through a combination of finite ideas, is a contradiction in terms, and as remote from the powers of the human mind, as an idea of sound to a man born without the organs of hearing.

The insufficiency of the understanding, thus exemplified, in conceiving an idea of a supreme first cause, suggested to men the expediency of recurring to the imagination for a solution of occurrences, too abstruse

for the understanding to develop. This fertile faculty, the *imagination*, which labours under the weight of an undivided mass of impressions, decides without hesitation on the crudities which surround it, which illegitimate conclusions have obtained the names of *caprice* and *fancy*. To the guidance of this wavering and delusive faculty, did men consign themselves, when they would soar beyond the bounds of a limited intellect, and search the invisible regions for agents of visible occurrences. Hence the imagination ascribed the various phenomena of nature to invisible beings, because it discovered no visible agent controlling the whirlwind and the storm. Alarmed by the idea of unseen agents itself created, interposing in the affairs of men, and feeling themselves exposed to the disasters of the hurricane and the thunder, they felt a necessity of conciliating their favour, to avert the unseen evils impending over their heads. Thus the imagination of men, without any just idea of a God, peopled the air and the earth with false and fictitious deities, whom they clothed with such powers and qualities as they deemed suitable to their various characters and functions.

As it was impossible that the inherent properties of human intellect could ever progress one step towards the conception of infinite truth, so it was, that in proportion as the minds of men expanded in the knowledge and science of which the extensive combination of ideas was capable, the objects of their veneration were multiplied in the same ratio, and the articles of their belief became more complex and confused, so that the farther men progressed in the knowledge attainable by the mere operation of the mind, the farther they diverged from a conception of a deity, and the qualities and attributes of an infinite being, conceivable only through an exertion of infinite power. Seeing then, that the contemplation of the objects of time and sense is insufficient to lead the mind to a perception

of the Deity, it became necessary that the knowledge of a God should be conveyed to the understanding through a medium he was capable of receiving it, viz: *by oral declaration, by visions, and by dreams.* Omnipotence is not confined to one or two of the senses through which to convey an idea of himself to the mind. He can manifest himself as well through the organs of sensation as through the organs of seeing and hearing. An objection therefore to DREAM, as a mode of communication to the mind, is futile in the extreme; for in spite of all the elaborate nothings, and unphilosophic speculations that visionary men have breached on the subject, dream is nothing else than that state of the mind, when the perceptive faculty enjoys an intermission of rest from the temporary repose of the active senses, and has only to dispose of the few ideas that internal sensation produce. In the state of silence and rest, when the faculty of perception, which never sleeps, is so much at leisure and disengaged, it is more eminently fitted to attend to any extraordinary impression on the organ of sensation, and imprint it more indelibly on the brain, than in the tumult and hurry of disposing of the mass of impressions that are crowded in when all the senses are in operation. Ordinary dreams are indeed nothing more than the perception of such ideas as are introduced by sensation, while the other avenues to the brain are closed up; these ideas, from their paucity, and no other cause, are generally as incapable of being arranged in a regular train of thought, as it would be to make fine music on a single string of a violin.

Shall we conclude then, that because there are not a sufficient number of ideas to constitute regular thought, presented to the perception in the time of sleep, that the perception itself is incapable of adjusting and classifying them if they were presented. I think it would be quite as reasonable to say, that a student was incapable of reciting one of the Odes of Horace, when only a few

words or letters of the Ode were called out and laid before him. If God is pleased to communicate any important matter to an individual, we cannot well conceive a more proper time and mode for such communication, than when all other thoughts and cares are hushed to rest, and the mind most happily modified to receive a lasting impression. Objections then to the possibility or propriety of God's revealing himself to man in dream, argues a very narrow view of the construction and faculties of the human mind, as well as of the power and supremacy of the Deity, who organized and fitted those faculties, as vehicles to convey a suitable knowledge of himself at proper times and seasons.

If the foregoing premises are just, the conclusions are irresistible, that the natural powers and operations of the human mind, are inadequate to the conception of a spiritual, invisible and infinite being; and that if the existence of such a being is ever to be the object of human contemplation, it must be conveyed to man by immediate revelation, as the only mode suitable to his power of perception. That although some philosophers have entertained notions of pursuing the ideas of time and space into eternity and infinity, yet when these ideas were taken apart from the boundaries of years and miles, they instantly mingled in disorder, and left no determinate impression on the mind, but became a confused and irregular heap, too large for the survey of the understanding, and surrounded with obscurity and difficulties, that the whole force of finite ideas could not dissipate and remove: Hence, that the idea of the true God lies far beyond the reach of human intellect, and can only be attained by an extraordinary impression on the senses, which arrangement, his wisdom foresaw was necessary to prevent us from approaching his sacred presence, at our pleasure, and penetrating his mysteries; but reserved to himself the power of revealing to us from time to time, as much knowledge of himself, as

was necessary and proper for the purposes of accomplishing his divine will and pleasure.

LETTER III.

THE VISIBLE CREATION IS NO REVELATION TO MAN, IN THE TRUE SENSE OF THE WORD.

SIR,

FROM a review of the nature and construction of the mind, and the inadequacy of the human intellect in its most perfect state, to aspire to a knowledge of an infinite being, we are irresistibly impressed with the great truth, that there was a necessity for a revelation from God to man, to acquaint him with his nature and attributes, and what line of conduct in the creature would be acceptable to his will, and correspond with the attributes thus made known. So indisputable is this position, that the Deists themselves acknowledge it, but contend that the visible creation, the sun—the moon—earth—air—and water, is that revelation; and that this is sufficient to teach mankind the nature of Deity, and the eternal principles of truth and justice.

But in order to test the principle by the experience of mankind, and by fair deductions from the faculties and operations of the human mind, it will be necessary to fix some definite idea to the term, *revelation*. Revelation then I shall define to be a disclosure or communication of facts or things, to a person or persons that were not before acquainted with the fact or thing communicated; and that such communication be made through a medium and by means adapted to the comprehension of those to whom it is made.

Now, if the Deity did intend to reveal any thing at all to man, it must have been a disclosure of his divine

character, and what conduct and disposition in the creature, would amount to an obedience and acknowledgment of the perfections thus developed. Any thing else, or any thing short of this, would have been useless and unnecessary. The visible creation, so far from revealing any thing at all to man, has the contrary tendency to perplex and astonish by the stupendous and inexplicable plan of the creator. The visible creation teaches us nothing farther than that the sun, moon, planets, and worlds exist; but how they came into being—for what purpose—whether man is an integral or an incidental part—what his destiny—all—all, is hidden in profound obscurity. The visible creation is a grand exhibition of power and art in the architect; but until its uses, its ends, and designs, are explained, it remains what the motion of a clock would be to a savage, who was completely ignorant of its intention and applicability to human purposes. The clock would reveal nothing to the savage but that such a curious thing was made, and the visible creation reveals nothing more to man, than that the world and all we see is created.

You, sir, are well acquainted with the almost unconquerable power of prejudice in the human mind. In your political warfare you have met with monarchists and aristocrats, who remained firm in political heresy against the whole force of your admirable *Crisis* and *Rights of Man*. So, sir, in matters of ethics and theology, we find Tindals, and Morgans, and Middletons, who remained as immovably bigoted in Deism, as if the visible creation had actually prescribed a rule for the regulation of our passions, and a conformity in our walk and conversation to the express command of God.

What can be more preposterous than the extract you yourself quote from Middleton in these words. "One of them appeared to be scandalized by the title of revelation, which I have given to that display God made of himself in the visible works of his creation:

“yet it is no other than what the wise in all ages have
 “given to it, who consider it as the most authentic and
 “indisputable revelation, which God has ever given of
 “himself from the beginning of the world to this day.
 “It was this by which the first notice of him was re-
 “vealed to the inhabitants of the earth, and by which
 “alone it has been kept up ever since among the several
 “nations of it. From this the reason of man was en-
 “abled to trace out his nature and attributes, and by a
 “gradual deduction of consequences, to learn his own
 “nature also, with all the duties belonging to it, which
 “relate either to God, or to his fellow creatures.”

This same Middleton must have been something else than a logician and a philosopher. Such a perversion of truth is excusable only in an enthusiast, who disdains to be shackled by the dictates of reason and common sense. I cannot consent to believe, sir, that your discriminating judgment will be warped from truth by the rant of such a madman; mere allegations without proof, or even plausibility to support it, cannot be countenanced by a man of your reading and abilities; can you believe, sir, that God would mistake the capacities of his creatures, and speak to them a language they did not, and could not understand; that he would reveal to them his will in a manner so far beyond their comprehension. Was there ever a people who through Middleton's revelation traced out the nature and attributes of Deity, and by gradual deduction of consequences, learnt his nature and their own too, with the duties pertaining to God and man? If so, where, or in what age of the world did they exist; and what other nation or people by their knowledge of the true God, proved the authenticity and universality of this “indisputable revelation from God to man.” A man certainly will excite our pity, who blusters and makes bold assertions, without one sorry proof from nature and the actual state of things, to keep him in countenance. A ground so untenable, as that God revealed himself and his will to

man by an exhibition of the visible universe to his senses, should be abandoned by every man who is capable of reasoning on just and rational principles. The display of the visible creation cannot constitute a revelation, inasmuch as the *matter* and *object*, the essentials of a revelation are wanting; for as soon as men know any thing, they know there is a creation; therefore it communicates no new matter they did not know before. A survey of the heavenly bodies conveys no idea of vice or virtue, of accountability, or punishment or reward; therefore the object of a revelation, if this were one, would be entirely defeated: Hence, unless the doctrine of Middleton, the strong hold of Deism, can be maintained by facts, by reason or even by plausibility, it is time that we should strip it of the imposing garb it has assumed, and exhibit it to its infatuated votaries what it really is, the empty phantasies of a superficial and luxuriant imagination, which at the touch of philosophy and reason, *vanishes like the fabric of a vision, and leaves not a wreck behind.*



LETTER IV.

THE NATIONS MOST CELEBRATED FOR THEIR KNOWLEDGE IN ARTS, COMMERCE AND SCIENCE, PROVIDED BY THEIR IGNORANCE IN MATTERS OF RELIGION, THAT THE VISIBLE CREATION WAS NO REVELATION TO THEM.

SIR,

IN recurring to the history of mankind, we find, that in their intercourse with each other, and even in times of tumult and war, the necessity of gaining intelligence, and transmitting proposals to each other, was universally assented to and acknowledged; which led to the policy of protecting messengers, or flags of truce,

as we have it, in the lines or even the camps of an enemy; and that from the earliest ages to the present time, men invariably governed themselves by the intelligence so or otherwise obtained. This inherent principle in human nature, of taking advantage of important information, must have been strangely perverted, if the momentous and particular intelligence conveyed in the works of creation, was totally and completely disregarded. I do think, sir, that if the fact is so, that the nations of the earth (except those instructed by special revelation) evinced by their conduct that they were not governed by the principles of the pretended revelation of the Deists. I say, I do think that they cannot, with the least propriety, or shadow of reason, persist in the speculations of Middleton, (who speaks for the whole brotherhood) as you have farther quoted. "For as it was from these, (the displays of visible nature) that his existence and nature, the most important articles of all knowledge, were first discovered to man, so that grand discovery furnished new light towards tracing out the rest, and made all the inferior subjects of human knowledge more easily discoverable to us by the same method." If so, we will find mankind thoroughly acquainted with the principles of rational religion. If the "volume of nature," as another Deist terms it, is so full of instruction, even to the minutia of religious duties, we shall certainly find at least, "the wise in all ages," paying adoration to, and inculcating the belief of one spiritual and omnipotent ruler and governor of the universe; but how are the facts? What do we find recorded in the annals of the ancient Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes, Persians, Carthaginians, Greeks and Romans, those nations so celebrated for their progress in every branch of human knowledge?

Did not "the wise in those ages," behold the undisturbed regularity of the planetary system, the succession of the seasons, and all the harmony of the machinery

of nature, and yet entertained the most whimsical and absurd ideas of the being of the divinity? What extravagant notions, what degrading rites, and what scandalous excesses were indulged by the devotees of their reigning deities? Some supposed the residence of their Gods to be fixed in the heavenly bodies, and consecrated temples to the sun; others, that the invisible powers were concentrated in fire, and erected altars in honour to the elements. The boasted "volume of nature," though wide open before them, instilled not in their minds the comprehensive idea of one superintending intelligence, capable of arranging and directing all the various operations of nature; hence the imagination assigned separate divinities to the several seemingly discordant phenomena of the physical world. One moved and regulated the sun and moon to shed the benign influence of his bounty, and another pointed the lightning and hurled the thunder, to give vent to the ebullitions of his vengeance; some rode in the whirlwind and directed the storm, while others ruled the groves, and the harvests, and the fields: thus we find a *Jupiter* in the heavens, a *Neptune* on the sea, and an *Eolus* in the wind.

The Babylonians and Persians paid particular adoration to the rising sun, and by a natural process of the mind, incorporated with this deity the element of fire, from its analogous properties and effects. From this combination originated the popular god of those times, known by the name of *Mithra*, to whom were dedicated with great religious pomp, chariots of curious workmanship, with the most beautiful and valuable horses the country afforded. This god was solemnly invoked by the *Magi* previous to their sacrifices, when the horrid ceremony of making their children pass through the fire was performed, with many other barbarous and ridiculous rites; which inhuman customs were common among other cotemporary nations. Besides their *Mithra*, they had also their *Oromasdes*, who dispensed

the blessings they enjoyed, and the *Arimanius*, who dealt out curses on the incorrigible contemners of Mithra. The sages and "wise men" among this people, understood not the pretended doctrines contained in the "volume of nature;" for instead of ascertaining the nature and attributes of God, and by "gradual deductions attain a knowledge of the rest," they pursued the absurdities and extravagancies of judicial astrology, founded on fraud and imposture, and for ages held an ignorant and credulous world in the trammels of a shameful superstition.

The Carthagenians, perhaps, will afford some symptoms of a better understanding of Middleton's "authentic revelation." Unfortunately, however, they knew nothing of one powerful and only divinity. On the contrary, they were provided with a confederacy of gods; they had their *Jupiter*, their *Apollo*, their *Hercules*, *Ioleus*, *Mars* and *Neptune*; added to these were two others who were esteemed pre-eminent in power, and to whom were paid particular worship and adoration. To the goddess *Jrania* were offered sweet incense and cakes, and drink offerings, and she was supposed to have the clouds and the rain in her safe and sacred keeping. But the god *Saturn*, whose voracious appetite was not to be fed, but with human blood, was delighted and pleased at the immolation of human victims; to assuage the anger of this frightful divinity, this people tore from their affections their beloved children, who were burnt on piles, and at length, by an improvement suggested by the same god, in a large brazen statue of himself, which was placed in the midst of a flaming furnace, the pitiful cries and moans of those expiring victims were drowned by the noise of drums and trumpets. Mothers filled with enthusiasm, were spectators of the horrible sacrifice of their children, and made a merit of suppressing the sighs, and stifling the groans, outraged nature would vent on the dreadful occasion. Women with their children in their arms.

would press with eagerness to offer them to their god, and would even endeavour, with embraces and kisses, to hush their fears and cries, lest it should appear their offerings were made with an ill grace, and call in question the soundness of their devotion.

I presume, sir, from this specimen of the Carthaginian theology, you will not insist on it as an emanation of that "authentic revelation" which was so clear and uncontradictory as to be easily distinguished from the "theology of the schools, the devices of priestcraft and fraud." But, sir, do not yet despair; let us turn our attention for a moment to ancient Egypt, that nursery of science and the elegant arts. We may there, perchance, discover a body of evidence that will dissipate our doubts at once, and establish the validity of Middleton's revelation, on the basis of eternal truth. Surely that distinguished people, whose inventions and improvements in architecture, in sculpture and painting, in poetry and music, in physics, mathematics and astronomy, have challenged the admiration of the whole world—surely, that people must have had correct notions of the divine government, if human genius was capable of conceiving it through the light derived from a contemplation of the visible creation: But here again, alas! are stumbling-blocks in the way of your favourite hypothesis. Notwithstanding this people were the first to observe the unerring course of the planets, and to regulate the year from an observation of their revolutions, yet with all their superiority in learning and application, they had not the most remote idea of the true God and his providence. Their objects of worship were numerous and of different orders and degrees; but among them were two principle ones, who were universally worshipped; their *Osiris* and their *Isis*, were their higher order of gods, whom from the qualities and dispositions ascribed to them, it is probable originated in the notion of the celestial properties of the sun and moon.

In the subordinate grade of the gods of this people, were the dog, the wolf, the ox, the cat, and many other beasts, birds and reptiles; but among the long list of secondary deities that shared the affections of this devout people, the bull *Apis* held an eminent and a distinguished rank. Temples were erected to him, and divine honours were paid him when alive, and at his death all Egypt went in mourning, and his funeral was attended with extraordinary pomp and parade; a new god, however, was necessary to fill the place of the defunct; the whole country was in search for a successor, and when a fine calf which resembled the deceased was found, this wise and learned people abandoned themselves to the extravagance of their joy.

Shall we, sir, conclude from thence, that the sage Middleton and his colleagues have endeavoured to impose on our understanding? Yet, we will go a little farther for fear of deciding too hastily. The Greeks were a people highly distinguished for their learning and politeness, their government and laws. The country that gave birth to Homer, and Hesiod, and Thales, and Solon, and Periander, and a host of others, must unquestionably have comprehended the instructions and laws conveyed to them in the formation of nature, every part of which are subjected to their nicest scrutiny and investigation. Yes, from conclusions drawn from reason and the nature of things, and the analogy of causes and effects, as evidenced in the observable arrangement of nature, this ingenious people framed a body of divinity, which, however, was supported on a different thesis than that of the instantaneous existence of order at the supreme mandate of **LET THERE BE LIGHT, &c.** They conceived a prior existence of two intelligencies, who were denominated Cupids; that the elder Cupid, or Eros, signifying celestial love, had for ages been enveloped in darkness, which they termed the great egg of night, and which was floating on the boundless bosom of chaos, till the celestial bull, with

his horn, set free the captive to enlighten and vivify the icy gloom of incipient nature, into the cheering warmth of spring.

From such beginnings, the ardent imaginations of the Greeks soon reduced to order a system of religion, and instituted in honour to their gods, their feasts, their oracles, divinations, shows and combats. What greater evidence, I would ask you, sir, can we have of the total ignorance of those nations respecting the existence and attributes of the Deity, than the monstrous ideas they had of the characters of their gods; they ascribed no superior excellence to their deities in point of moral rectitude; they only allowed them the pre-eminence in point of power. The gods, according to them, were actuated by violent and impure passions, and were guilty of scandalous adventures and crimes; hence their worship was calculated to promote vice and debauchery, and the total subversion of piety and every virtuous principle.

Among the numerous feasts of this worship, the most celebrated and conspicuous was the feast of *Eleusis*; here were performed the highest feats of fraud and imposture. It was pretended that the most sacred mysteries were revealed to the initiated, which they were enjoined to keep in profound secrecy, under pain of incurring the anger of the gods. The temper and fortitude of the candidate was tested by the most terrific representations; extraordinary visions and voices assailed his eyes and ears; a sudden splendour of unusual brilliancy astonished the new votary at one moment, and the next as suddenly disappeared, to augment the horrors of the surrounding gloom; tremendous spectres, thunders, and earthquakes, almost annihilated the trembling novice, while voices, believed supernatural, pronounced in awful accents, the Eleusinian mysteries. Here were no disciples of the "theology of the schools," nor did *the wise of this age* discover the creator in the

magnificence of his works; but the wisest men, the profoundest philosophers, the greatest princes, and all who valued themselves for their learning and wisdom, were all infatuated with the general phrenzy. The Amphictions, those far-famed wise men, had the superintendance of rebuilding the Delphic Temple after the first was burnt—that very temple, in which the *Pythia* and the *Cybele* with foaming mouths and furious looks, pronounced the will of heaven from the sacred tripods:

Thus have I taken a cursory view of the practical religion, and the ideas entertained by the wisest nations of the ancient world, with respect to the being and nature of the Deity; from which the conclusion is strong and indeed irresistible, that the hinging point of Deism, viz: *that the visible creation as displayed to man is the only genuine revelation that God thought worthy to be given to him*, is founded in error, and entirely unsupported by the least shadow of truth. If then, it is proved that the human mind, in the plenitude of its power, is incapable of penetrating heaven, and learning the nature and the will of the supreme, from whence came the information given to the Hebrews through the hands of Moses; “There is one God, and there is
 “but one, and he alone deserves to be worshipped.
 “He is the Supreme Being, the necessary origin of all
 “things; no other is comparable to him. He is a pure
 “spirit, immense and infinite; no bodily shape can re-
 “present him. He created the universe by his power;
 “he governs it by his wisdom, and rules all its events by
 “his providence. Nothing escapes his watchful eye;
 “all good and evil proceed from his equitable hand,
 “and as every thing comes from him, so every thing
 “enters in him again. I am the Lord thy God,” said
 the Deity to his creatures, “thou shalt have no other
 “Gods but me; thou shalt not make thee any graven
 “image; thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy
 “heart and strength; thou shalt not covet, thou shalt
 “love thy neighbour.” We have already seen that the

genius of man cannot reach the sublimity and grandeur of such ideas; do they not then come from Heaven? Moses himself, though well versed in the knowledge and literature of the wisest people in the world, was so struck with admiration and surprise when the excellence of those laws were revealed to him, that he burst out in transports and exclaimed, “ what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous, as all this law which I set before you this day.”

Will Deism, in the face of such testimony, still continue to cavil? Will infidelity, in spite of proof, still urge the stale objection, that the revelation God made to the Hebrews, was not given to Moses, but is an ingenious forgery of later times? Such a forgery would indeed have been a rare production in late or early times; for among men, the subject matter was unattainable without the intervention of supernatural aid. The conduct of the Hebrews at that time, will determine whether the injunctions of the revelation were then known and practised, or whether it was invented in later times. Cotemporary writers who took nature for their guide, and paid divine honours to imaginary divinities, bear witness that the religion and worship of the Hebrews corresponded with the dogmas of the divine code. *Tacitus*, a respectable historian, and whose testimony I presume you will admit, says, “ The Jews worshipped but one God, whom they conceived only in thought. A sovereign, eternal and unchangeable. They esteemed those profane who employed perishable substances to represent the divinity under a human form; for this reason, they have no statues in their temples, nor even in their cities.”

LETTER V.

GOD DID SPECIALLY REVEAL HIMSELF TO A PORTION OF MANKIND.

SIR,

IF upon the whole you should feel inclined to allow that the system you have adopted is surrounded with difficulties not easily removed, and that the powers of the human mind are more circumscribed than you at first apprehended; seeing that by reason alone we cannot conceive an idea of the being and essence of Deity, the question occurs, how did man attain the portion of knowledge he has, of God and his Providence? A history the most ancient, and the best authenticated of any extant, and which in its most material relations is corroborated by every other ancient history, (I mean the Bible) does declare unequivocally, that the two first human beings that were made, (and mankind must have had a beginning) were placed on this globe, after the general laws of nature had commenced their operation, with all the faculties of observation, reflection, and judgment ripe for instantaneous discrimination and decision. Not being brought into existence by the ordinary mode of generation, their production subsequent to the establishment of general laws, was of course a miraculous exertion of supreme power, not coinciding with, nor a necessary result of their operation. Now, although short-sighted men affect to sneer at the idea of miracles, because of their seeming discordance with established rules, we here find that the production of our first parents was effected by a miracle. Indeed, it would be absurd to suppose, that the first pair could be produced by the ordinary process of nature, and if produced otherwise, it would be equally absurd to deny it was by miracle. All the philosophy and ingenuity

ever exercised by casuists and deists, cannot invalidate this precedent and authority for miracles. To obviate such a stubborn difficulty was a desideratum sought for in vain, till some cavillers of genius hit on the lucky idea of the *eternity of matter*. The ancient philosophers who broached the conceit, held very extravagant and contradictory notions respecting the origin of the world. *Aristotle*, whose superior genius procured him the title of Prince of Philosophers, insisted, that there never could have been a time in which matter did not exist; that the Deity himself could not have made a world without materials, and that the eternal existence of matter as a counterpart of spirit, was as necessary, as the eternal existence of spirit as the counterpart of matter, the object of its operation; he therefore boldly pronounced the notion of a creation as contrary to reason and sound philosophy. His followers not only embraced his tenets with rapture, but actually improved on the crude speculations of their master. They carried their refinement so far as to pretend that not only matter, but the earth in its form and revolutions, with all its productions of vegetables and animals (man included) must of necessity have been co-existent with universal and spiritual existence; as a prior existence of spirit and matter, without their mutual operation on each other, was admitting a principle to exist, and not to exist at the same time.

Observation however, and the spirit of true philosophy, at length brought the notion of the duration of matter into disrepute, and the genius of cavilling was reduced to the shift of proving the earth older than the bible made it, to countenance their obstinacy and objections to the validity of its testimony. Hence the earth's surface was attentively scrutinized, and the nature and disposition of its interior strata minutely examined for evidence against the authenticity of the bible.—With a perseverance worthy of a better pursuit, the beds of Lava in the vicinity of burning mountains, were ripped up for matter to prop up the ramparts of unbelief. A stra-

tum of Lava near Mount *Ætna* was found to be covered with a considerable thickness of soil; and another which from authentic records must have issued from the volcano two thousand years ago was found almost destitute of plants or soil. In another place a pit was dug which presented a regular succession of layers of Lava and soil. Hence it was concluded that the almost naked stratum of two thousand years old, would in time acquire as deep a soil as the other layers, and calculating that as two thousand years of time had only covered that substance with here and there a few inches of soil, fourteen or fifteen hundred thousand years must have elapsed to produce the number of layers with their soils discovered in the pit. These imposing conclusions however, were met by arguments sufficient to refute them; and from the circumstance of the bed of 2000 years old laying in an extraordinary exposed situation to high winds, an accumulation of soil might as reasonably be expected on rocks and cliffs which are known to be always barren. Infidelity however, was not to be overcome by argument and reason; and like drowning men who catch at straws in their extremity, the vagaries of Plato's *Atlantis*, the dreams of the Chaldean astronomical calculations, and the fictitious records of the Egyptian priests with three or four hundred generations between *Menes* and *Sethon*, were with much other absurdity and fable, pressed in the service of their cause. But as a great many nothings are in their nature incapable of making an adequate substitute for something, the temporary importance of *Ætna's* eruptions, and the promised developement of ancient fiction, have had their day and passed "like the shadow that returneth not." Failing then in the objection that the eternity of matter afforded, and the extraordinary age of the earth not being supported by satisfactory testimony, both the hypothesis must of necessity be rejected as visionary and absurd.

Convinced of the error and unreasonableness of the various dreams and conjectures of speculative philoso-

phers, we return with increased interest to a candid investigation of the pages of that ancient narrative, which has so wonderfully stood the test of scrutinizing ages after ages, and criticising generations after generations, and which in the course of such repeated examinations has more and more discovered the boundless wisdom by which it has been dictated.

The genius of man has ever been on the alert to discover the springs and motions of the human heart, in order to frame such a code of morals and laws, as would secure and perpetuate the bonds of social harmony; and so promising were the results of the wisdom and researches of such great men as Zoroaster, Confucius, Minos, Solon, Lycurgus and many others, that they fondly believed themselves to have discovered the invaluable secret of circumscribing the wanderings and irregularities of human volition and conduct; but time and experience, those unerring touchstones of truth, demonstrated the fallibility of their respective systems, and proved that the utmost stretch of human sagacity, was incompetent to explore the mazes and intricacies of the sources of human action. Is it reasonable then to suppose, that a race of men existed before those mentioned, so infinitely superior in wisdom and the knowledge of human nature, as to digest a body of laws and ordinances, comprising the multifarious results of the different relations of justice, and founded in those eternal principles of right and the nature and fitness of things, which supports the vast fabric of ethics and moral obligation. Was human genius ever competent to devise a set of regulations, susceptible of universal application, and adapted to the many changes of circumstances that occur among men in some thousands of ages? no rational man will admit that it was. Such a system of laws however does exist, and has been in operation from time immemorial. The bible presents to us such a fund of important information, such a system of rules for the regulation of human conduct, adapted to all

nations and people, to all times and circumstances, as renders it in itself the highest possible evidence of its coming from supernatural authority ; so clearly indeed do the scriptures evince their divine origin, that they have become the ground work and constitution of all other human regulations, when made with a view to equity and justice. The scripture code is now the standard, or first principles on which all our laws are founded, and which acquire validity and force only from the circumstance of their squaring with the principles exhibited in the bible. Here, instead of the reveries of phantastic philosophism, we have a clear and lucid account of the origin of the world, the promulgation of natural law, the formation of our first parents by an extraordinary exertion of divine power ; the disposition and properties of human nature portrayed, the duties and obligations of man to god, and himself, designated—and the consequences of obedience and disobedience exhibited in vivid colors, to illustrate the purity and justice of the divine injunctions. Here, instead of the mockeries and absurdities inculcated in the systems of mere human invention, we find prescribed benevolence, justice, charity, love, patience and forbearance ;—and in short, the doctrines and precepts given to us in the bible, all tend to promote and perpetuate the felicity and happiness of the human race, and they manifest the author possessed of that boundless knowledge of universal nature, that human genius without divine inspiration, is incapable of conceiving.

If then it is conceded (and I trust sir, you cannot dissent from the position) that the scriptures constitute that infallible code of first principles, the eternal and immutable laws of right and wrong, which, independent of abstract rules and precepts, is itself that pure and demonstrative principle coexistent with deity itself ;—if by the common consent of the truly wise and learned, the bible is recognized as the original and fundamental rule of justice, on which all civil and municipal law is founded,

—then, I say, it follows of consequence, that such high authority can emanate from nothing less than divinity itself. From what else, I would ask you can it be derived? not surely from the speculations of those ancient sages, whose wisdom could incorporate incest and thieving in systems of national policy, and give countenance to practices subversive of every principle of justice and truth.

When we recur to past times, and see the numberless projects and conceits of the wisest men, swept into the regions of darkness at the approach of reason and true philosophy—and then contemplate the simplicity, the purity, and the power of the bible system, standing erect amidst the concussions and dissolution of ages and empires, we cannot restrain our wonder that a reasonable man would pronounce it the invention of men; as well might he contend that the earth's surface was flat as a trencher, and that the sun advanced from the eastern to the western horizon in the day time, and performed her retrograde again in the night time.

The evidence then afforded by the intrinsic excellence of the scriptures, that they were dictated by a power superior to man, proves that God did in an especial manner communicate his will to him. The necessity of such a communication, and we have seen that mankind have no knowledge of any other, taken with the wisdom and momentous matter displayed in the scriptures, are sufficient to dispel the doubts of the most captious objector; and from this high authority it is, that we are assured that God did reveal himself to our first parents, and that he did at sundry other times communicate to a generation of people he reserved for that purpose, his power, his goodness, and his special protection; his threatenings for disobedience and his promises for the observance of his will. From this indisputable authority then, it is proved, that God did reveal himself to man, and that the scriptures contain the substance of the revelations so made.

LETTER VI.

THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH WAS FORETOLD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, AND HIS APPEARANCE, WITH REGARD TO TIME AND MANNER, ANSWERED THE PREDICTIONS RESPECTING HIM.

SIR,

FROM the long and successful career of your literary life, and from that habit of cool investigation which has deservedly procured you a niche in the temple of fame, I am warranted in the belief, that you will weigh with your usual candour, the arguments I have adduced to enforce the necessity of a revelation, other than that contended for by the advocates of Deism; and that the Old Testament was a portion of such other revelation, inasmuch as there was not any other better authenticated data, from which to trace the nature and attributes of a supreme first cause.

Agreably then to the method I proposed to pursue, I now come to the immediate subject of your last publication, in which you endeavour to shew, that the coming of the Messiah was not predicted in the Old Testament, and that the passages usually received as prophecies of his coming, have no relation to such an event.

The whole tenor of the religious part of the Old Testament is, that our first parents came from the hands of their creator in a pure and holy state; not having the power of offending prior to their existence, they must of necessity have commenced their lives without spot and blemish, and void of every possible offence. That they were endowed with capacities to resist the allurements of the senses, and walk in exact conformity to the mandates of their Maker; but that instigated by pride, and regardless of the injunctions of Jehovah, they

apostatized from the mild and beneficent requirements of their benefactor, and forfeited that rank in the scale of creation, that love and obedience would have entitled them to; that the act of disobedience rendered them obnoxious to the penalties of a broken law, and entailed certain disabilities on their whole posterity, which, in effect, did expose them to hardships and privations, and an exclusion from the divine presence, till a suitable satisfaction was offered for the law thus infringed, by some person who would bear the burthens of them all; that the hardships and penalties incurred by such violation, must be borne with patience and resignation; and that a deliverer would in due time appear, who would take upon him the grievance of his people, and restore them to all the rights and immunities they had lost.

I should swell these letters two far beyond the limits I intended them, to go at large into all the evidence the books of Moses and the Prophets afford, to prove that Jesus Christ was the Messiah promised by God, and expected by the Jews. I shall, therefore, content myself with adducing a few of the most striking predictions that point more immediately to the advent of Christ; and which, if no other person ever appeared to whom they were more applicable, is of itself a strong corroboration of the positive annunciations of the Prophets. In the book of Genesis, we find that Jacob, in bestowing his benedictions on his sons, prophetically informs Judah, “That his brethren shall praise him; that his hands
“ shall be in the neck of his enemies; that his father’s
“ children shall bow down before him; that his sceptre
“ shall not depart from him, nor a law giver from be-
“ tween his feet, till Shiloh come; and unto him shall
“ the gathering of the people be.” Jacob could by no kind of human calculation foresee, that in process of time, the ruling power would be fixed in the family of Judah—that at the end of that dynasty the promised deliverer would appear; but such, however, were the facts, and who but Omniscience, through whose influ-

ence Jacob spoke, could foretell such a revolution in a mighty empire.

The ancient Jewish doctors have universally put this, or a similar construction, on this prediction of Jacob. Ben Uzziel renders it, "Kings shall not cease from the house of Judah, until king Messiah come: unto whose kingdom all the nations of the earth shall be subject." And many others varied the phraseology of the passage, but substantially concurred in the same meaning.

The book of Isaiah is full of predictions and allusions to the coming and offices of the Messiah; the prophet, however, is not so fortunate as to be in your good graces, because he does not treat his subject with that regularity and perspicuity that a treatise on the abuses of the British government is susceptible of. But to the unprejudiced eye, the book of Isaiah abounds with a grandeur and sublimity of description, that is sought for in vain in the most celebrated work of human genius.

You have quoted some of his prophecies which the evangelists understood as alluding to the Messiah, but with which you are determined to be dissatisfied; this goes to show that Matthew and you differ in opinion on the subject, and I cannot well discover that it goes to shew any thing farther. You have inadvertently overlooked some passages in this prophet, which in conjunction with those Matthew has laid so much stress on, might not on an attentive perusal appear so unapt as you seem to imagine. For instance, in chapter second he says "It shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it; and many people shall go and say, come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the

“ law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem : and
 “ he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke
 “ many people, and they shall beat their swords into
 “ plough-shares and their spears into pruning-hooks.”
 Whenever any of the prophets speak of Christ’s king-
 dom, it is always characterised as a peaceable and con-
 ciliating government ; it is ever announced as tidings of
 joy and gladness : “ Rejoice ye daughters of Jerusalem,
 “ for your king cometh.—Break forth into joy, ye
 “ daughters of Zion, shout and cry aloud for joy,” &c.
 On the contrary, when the people are warned of the
 approach of an earthly potentate or conqueror, that is
 to execute vengeance and spread desolation : “ Howl,
 “ O gate, cry, O city, for there cometh a smoke from
 “ the north : howl, ye inhabitants of the isles, sit down
 “ in the dust, O daughter of Babylon : get thee into
 “ the darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans : Wo to
 “ Ariel, the city of David,” &c. I hope sir you will
 notice this distinction.

When we are in search of truth, we should use the
 utmost circumspection in quoting such passages as are
 to be urged as authorities, to enforce or illustrate a
 favorite construction, and it is to be lamented that you
 should have so hurried over the transaction between
 Isaiah and Ahaz, as to misconceive, and give a turn
 to that affair so totally contrary to the facts there re-
 corded. You represent Isaiah as giving assurances to
 Ahaz, that the confederate kings, whose object was the
 chastisement of his person, should not prevail against
 him ; but that they nevertheless succeeded and of course
 that Isaiah was guilty of a falsehood ; and further, that
 the child to be born, which was spoken of as a sign,
 was not to arrive to years of discretion, till Ahaz in
 person was rescued from the danger that threatened
 him ; but Ahaz did not escape personal defeat, there-
 fore, the sign was a false one. This is indeed ex-
 pounding the scriptures to answer temporary purposes.
 Throwing aside prejudice and pre-conceived opinions for

a moment, I hope you will not refuse to follow me through my illustration of this passage of Isaiah. We find then, that Ahaz the reigning prince of the house of Judah had so repeatedly manifested a wicked and an idolatrous disposition, that God had determined to curtail his career. Accordingly the kings of Israel and Syria conceive the idea of warring against Judah. The object of the confederacy however, was not to plunder and levy contributions, nor to chastise the person of the reigning king—but to revolutionize the government, to subvert the constitution, and to set up in the midst of it a new king, “Even the son of Tabeal.” This it was that the prophet said, should not stand, viz. that the sceptre should not pass from the line of Judah through the intrigues of these *flaming firebrands*; and to buoy up the people’s hopes above despair, he requested Ahaz himself to ask a sign, to give it the greater publicity; but Ahaz refused, for which the prophet rebuked him, and then addressed the nation,—“Hear ye now, O House of David, (not O Ahaz.) Therefore the Lord shall give you a sign”; not a sign that Ahaz himself should escape the vengeance that awaited him, but that the line of the house of David should not be broken. “Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat that he may know to refuse the evil and choose the good; for before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.” The prophet then proceeds to denounce the punishments that would be inflicted on the people for their idolatrous disposition, and continues the subject thro’ the 8th and 9th chapters. “Forasmuch” he continues. “as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloh that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Ramaliah’s son, therefore the Lord bringeth upon them the waters of the river strong and many, &c. he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel”—he announces

a long series of suffering, and trouble, and dimness, and anguish; nevertheless, the dimness shall not be such as was inflicted at a former time. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." Here then instead of confusion of ideas and ranting metaphors," is a prediction which was fulfilled in every material circumstance as the subsequent events amply testify. The express object for which the war was commenced by the confederate kings was frustrated, as the prophet had foretold, for instead of a new race of kings to commence with *the son of Tabeal*, we find Hezekiah succeed to the throne at the demise of his father Ahaz; and the sign of the conception of the virgin, though rather obscure at the time it was given, is strikingly elucidated in the sequel of events. The sign was given to the nation at large, as a promise to animate the hopes of the then present generation, and to inspire with confidence the generations to come, seeing that before the maturity of the son, before the government should rest on the shoulder of the Prince of Peace, the houses of Israel and Syria became extinct, and the son of Tabeal did not supplant the line of Judah, and that a lawgiver did not depart from between his feet, till Shiloh, or the Prince of Peace did come.

It is frivolous to object to the prophecies on account of their want of formality and intimate connection. It is not the nature of inspiration to detail a regular series of future events; but it is given at different times, on various and different occasions. Isaiah is full of predictions and allusions to a final restoration to such of his nation as continued to walk in the statutes of the Lord their God, and faithfully to rely on his manifold promises; that his restoration was to be effected by a more than human agent is evident, as he is to be called the mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of

Peace. Cavillers however will not be convinced, tho' one should rise from the dead to instruct them. Some therefore pretend that the delineation given by Isaiah, was applicable, and descriptive of Cyrus; but this involves a difficulty—as Cyrus did not appear till one hundred and fifty years after the death of Isaiah, the prophet must necessarily have spoken by inspiration to foretell events so far distant. In this dilemma, the caviller has no other resource, than to pretend the writer was not Isaiah, but some impostor, who lived 150 years after him; for, it is well known, that Isaiah was cotemporary with Ahaz and Hezekiah. It may be, that some merit is due to such extraordinary patience, and the hardships of shifting, that cavillers are subject to; but then it is in consideration of their patience only. If no other argument existed to refute such flimsy objections, the admirable uniformity of style that pervades the whole book, is of itself sufficient; the work itself carries its own testimony, that it all flowed from the same mind:—and really sir, if you, as other deists have done, can attribute the book of Isaiah to different authors, and that too of different periods of time, you will manifest a degree of ignorance, of the diversity and nice shades of disjunction in the human intellect, that I would not willingly attribute to the author of the “Rights of Man.”

The prophet having given the character of the Messiah proceeds in the subsequent parts of the book to describe his power and offices; and, at the close, gives an affecting account of his life and sufferings. “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him, he was despised and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet, we did esteem him stricken and smitten of God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.” In the same

prophetic manner, he continues to describe the particulars of his death and character: He was oppressed, and cut out of the land for the transgression of his people; he did no violence, but patiently bore the iniquities of us all. None I hope will have the hardihood to alledge, that this too, is descriptive of Cyrus. Cyrus was not despised and rejected, he did not bear our griefs, nor was cut out of the land for the transgressions of his people, nor did the travail of his soul afford a satisfaction for the righteousness of many.

Having thus, sir, noticed some passages in Isaiah, which appeared too trifling to you, to merit investigation, I pass over the lesser prophets who were cotemporaries, but who all, by the bye, afford sufficient testimony that a Messiah was confidently expected.

As you made it a point to confine yourself to the prophecies alluded to by the Evangelists, you have necessarily passed over the most material and striking testimony, that the Old Testament is indeed the foundation that supports the fabric of the Gospel of Christ. The Evangelists it is true, made but slight and partial references to the scriptures; but Christ himself publicly invited the people, to test the validity of his mission by that standard; search the scriptures, said he, for these are they that testify of me. And on another occasion, the Jews themselves exclaimed, this is indeed him of whom the prophets spoke.

The prophet Daniel points out clearly the coming, the offices, and the passion of the Messiah. "He shall make a reconciliation for iniquity, being in everlasting righteousness, and seal up the vision and the prophecy.—He shall be cut off, but not for himself, and he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease." Daniel also determines the time of his coming, calculating from the issuing of the decree, for rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. Learned chronologers have indeed

held different opinions respecting the precise time of the ending of Daniel's calculation; but the Jews were so convinced that the Messiah was to come about the time he did appear, (and surely they understood their own prophets) that every extraordinary personage was anxiously scrutinized, with an expectation that it might be he. Josephus informs us, that their confidence of his appearing about that time, urged them on to that disastrous war they waged with the Roman power. Their Talmud also records, that their obstinacy was supported by the consideration, that the Messiah who was to come, would now appear, and lead them on to victory and glory. I should swell this letter to a volume, were I to recount all the proof of which the case is susceptible, that the coming of the Messiah was foretold by the prophets, and that those predictions were substantially fulfilled. In the reign of Augustus Cæsar an extraordinary personage did appear, who was called Christ, or the Messiah. In him were verified all the predictions of the prophets. He appeared about the time that had been appointed for his coming, and with him the sacrifice and oblation ceased. He was poor and afflicted, and a man of grief; was bruised, and cut out of the land, but not for himself, having committed no violence or crime, worthy of death. In short, his birth, his life, his character, his suffering and death, were all so clearly pointed out by the prophets before him, and as there never appeared any other person to whom their predictions were any way applicable, it amounts to nothing less than a stupid and wilful obstinacy, to doubt that Jesus Christ was the Messiah that God had promised to a guilty world, to reinstate them in his favour.

LETTER VII.

THE PERSON CALLED JESUS CHRIST, POSSESSED A KNOWLEDGE AND POWERS BEYOND THE REACH OF HUMAN INTELLECT. AND THE RELIGION HE ESTABLISHED IS OF DIVINE ORIGIN.

SIR,

I PRESUME you will not seriously hesitate to admit, that during the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius Cæsar, an extraordinary character, who was called Jesus Christ, did actually exist, and preach among the Jews in and about Jerusalem. That he did declare himself sent by God, as the Messiah promised in the scriptures; that he excited much jealousy among the leading men of the nation; and that he was finally executed, in an ignominious manner, on a charge of usurpation, blasphemy and imposture. These facts being admitted, and availing ourselves of the concurrent testimony of the Jewish and Pagan writers of the times, that a deliverer was confidently looked for, and expected about that time, the hingepoint of christian orthodoxy, is then reduced to the following text. Does the life, the character, and the death of Jesus Christ, correspond with, and verify the promises and predictions that were made of him by the prophets in the Old Testament.— It is true, the Jews had some how imbibed a notion, that the Messiah was to appear among them in the character of a military chieftain; that his achievements would rescue their suffering country from the oppression it lay under, and once more exalt them to that eclat and grandeur, for which they had formerly been distinguished. The prophets however had portrayed him in quite a different character; he was to be a messenger of peace; to be unacquainted with violence and deceit. His business was not to be leading armies,

and directing the energies of war; but it was, to seal up the prophecies, to confirm the covenant, and to make an end of sin. His life was to be painful and humiliating, and his end to be marked with sorrow and ignominy. Did, or did not, the life and death of Jesus Christ, answer the prophecies in these particulars. At this point sir, the believer and the deist must have a meeting; after the stratagems and skirmishes of a desultory warfare, in this field the combat must be determined; these are the straits of *Thermopyle* that must be passed or defended.

It is worse than trifling, to make loose assertions that Christ was not the person spoken of, till it is proved that he made false pretensions, failed in his promises, was detected in fraudulent practices and publicly exposed as a deceitful impostor; was this done, or was it not? *Suetonius* and *Pliny* bear testimony to his extraordinary sanctity, and inoffensive deportment; and *Josephus* vouches the amiableness of his character, the violence of his death, and his rising again. "In the reign of "Tiberus," says he, "there was one Jesus, a wise "man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was the "performer of divers miraculous works, and the in- "structor of those who willingly entertained the truth. "This was Christ, who being accused by the princes "of our nation before Pilate, and afterwards condemned "to the cross. Yet did not his followers forbear to "love him, for the ignominy of the death; for he ap- "peared to them the third day after, as the divine pro- "phet had before testified of the same." Here then we find the Messiah identified by the most respectable writers and historians of that time, and that he did attain the reputation of possessing extraordinary wisdom, and of exercising a power beyond the comprehension of men, and that himself bore testimony of his rising again in three days after his execution. Thus much being proved positively, by witnesses too, who cannot be suspected of partiality towards Jesus, we may now ad-

mit his own testimony with respect to himself, especially as such testimony is corroborated by other witnesses who were personally present, and in the act of watching and scrutinizing his conduct, for the purpose of catching some expression or action on which to accuse him before the men in power.

Christ himself declared unequivocally, that he was the Messiah—that the scriptures bore testimony of him—and that the miracles he wrought before them, ought to convince them ; that he would lead a life of suffering—be betrayed by one of his followers, and that he would die an ignominious death and rise again on the third day. He exhorted the people publicly, to receive him, such as he really was, and that if the works he did were not sufficient to convince them, they were not bound to believe him ; that if any man ever did, or could do what he did, they were not to blame for rejecting him. At the same time he openly at the gates of the temple, and in the presence of multitudes, healed all kinds of diseases, made the lame walk, the blind see, the deaf hear, and the dead rise ;—astonishment seizes the bystanders, hundreds are convinced and follow him saying, of a truth this is that prophet which was to come into the world.

The Pharisees, however, remained incorrigible, notwithstanding they were eye witnesses to the miracles he wrought ; and to some that were done on the Sabbath, they objected, as being a breach of the holy day ; they pretended not to deny the matter of fact ; like cavillers of the present day, they confessed the wonders they saw, but charged them to be performed by diabolic aid. Could all this have been mockery and imposture? If so, how came it, the Jews did not prove it upon him? But how was it possible to prove an overt act, when there were no grounds for suspicion itself? His conduct was so blameless ; his life so exemplary ; his wisdom so great, and his benevolence so extraordinary,

that on his trial, amidst the malice of his enemies, not a vice, nor an immoral action could be laid to his charge.

What will Deism oppose to this flood of truth, so proven and substantiated by the friends and the enemies of the Messiah; will its forlorn advocates, with conviction staring them in the face, persist to take refuge in the groundless assertion, that all is imposture? As well, then, might we undertake to convince them, that white and black are the same thing, as to attempt to dispel the cloud that envelopes them.

Really, sir, I am at a loss how incredulity can be longer kept in countenance. Among the ignorant and uninformed, it would not excite our wonder if they rejected the doctrines of magnetism and electricity as visionary speculations, and the planetary revolutions round a common centre, as audacious and absurd; but what would you think of a philosopher and a scholar, who would seriously maintain, that the radii of the same circle were unequal to each other, or that the inhabitants at the antipodes must necessarily walk on their heads? Not a whit less ridiculous is the pertinacity of the man, whose mind, expanded by learning and science, is competent to discriminate between the connection or repugnance of various propositions, and yet reject a conclusion, that a series of demonstrable facts can no more render otherwise, than two and two can make any thing else but four.

Laying aside every other consideration, the single circumstance of Christ's prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jewish nation, is alone sufficient to shame the charge of imposture into eternal silence. "Seest thou these great buildings?" says the Messiah: "There shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down. The days shall come upon thee, O Jerusalem, when thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and keep

“ thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with
 “ the ground, and shall not leave thee one stone upon
 “ another. And great earthquakes shall be in divers
 “ places, and famines, and pestilences, and fearful sights;
 “ and great signs there shall be from heaven; there
 “ shall be great tribulation, such as never happened
 “ from the beginning of the world to this time. They
 “ shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led
 “ away captive into all nations; and Jerusalem shall be
 “ trodden down of the Gentiles. This generation shall
 “ not pass away till all these things be fulfilled.”

How was this remarkable prophecy fulfilled? Suetonius, and Tacitus, and Jornandes, and Josephus, all bear testimony to its complete accomplishment. “ Vespa-
 “ sian’s army,” says Josephus, “ compassed the city
 “ round about with a wall of 39 furlongs, having on
 “ it thirteen towers, and kept them in on every side,
 “ and so made it impossible for the Jews within the city
 “ to escape.”

That “ he commanded his soldiers to dig up the foun-
 “ dations of the city, which was so completely done, by
 “ levelling the whole compass of it except three tow-
 “ ers, that they who came to see it were persuaded it
 “ could never be built again.”

That “ the great gate of the temple was seen to open
 “ of its own accord; a sword appeared hanging over
 “ the city; a comet was seen pointing down upon it for
 “ a whole year together. Before the sun went down,
 “ there appeared armies in battle array, and chariots
 “ compassing the country, and investing the cities: a
 “ thing so strange, that it would pass for fable, were
 “ there not men living to attest it.”

That “ there never was a nation more wicked, nor a
 “ city that suffered more. All the miseries that man-
 “ kind had suffered from the beginning of the world,

“ were not to be compared with those the Jewish nation suffered. The number of captives was ninety-seven thousand. Titus sent many to Egypt, and most of them were dispersed into the Roman provinces.”

Tacitus mentions, likewise, the fearful sights and signs from heaven that Christ foretold them should precede their destruction. “ Armies,” says that historian, “ seemed to encounter, and weapons to glitter in the sky; the temple seemed to blaze with fire issuing from the clouds; and a voice more than human was heard, declaring that the deities were quitting the place, which was attended with the sound of a great motion, as of persons going away.”

Historians tell us that from six to eleven hundred thousand perished by famine, disease and the sword; and soon after a destructive persecution of the Jews took place through the Roman empire, on pretence of their disaffection. This tremendous revolution happened within forty years after the death of the Messiah; so that some of the generation who heard the prediction, were eye witnesses to its awful and disastrous fulfilment.

Was it possible to foresee such wonderful events, and describe them so minutely, except by a wisdom not pertaining to mortals? How unfortunate then it was for you, to have been so wound up in exposing the imposture of Jesus Christ, as to assert that there never was such a person; that it was all allegory, and that there is no history written at the time, that says any thing about him. When a writer indulges himself in such extravagancies, he forfeits all claim to respectful attention. It is somewhat awkward to prove a man a rogue and a swindler, and then to prove him never to have existed. But Deism can prove any thing. Middleton can prove the creation to be the only authentic revelation to man, and Thomas Paine can prove, notwithstanding he be-

believes in future rewards and punishments, that " many
 " souls will be found neither good nor bad enough to
 " be worth the trouble of damning or saving, and will
 " consequently be left to themselves."

Such incongruities ever were, and necessarily will be the legitimate offspring of an obstinate and wilful unbelief. To such it was said, though one should rise from the dead, they would not believe him. How awful, then, must be the situation of such, when the *son of man* shall come in the clouds, and frown indignant on the contemners of his name. Well may they solicit the rocks and the mountains to hide them from the fiery indignation of an insulted God.

But history informs us that all could not resist the truth. The remarkable conversion of Paul brought over thousands to conviction and faith. Apollos convinced many, proving by the Old Testament that Jesus was the Messiah. All this took place immediately subsequent to the testimony Christ himself had given; is it credible then, that these people were all imposed upon? The charge of imposture comes with an ill grace in the face of such events; not only at that time, but in the succeeding ages, thousands of Jews as well as Gentiles, laid by their unbelief, and embraced the religion of Christ. Among these were men celebrated for their learning and acquirements, such as *Nicholas de Lyra*, *Paulus Burgensis*, *Ernestus Ferdinandus*, and many others who proved to their countrymen by irrefragable arguments, that the Messiah was come, and that Jesus Christ was he.

From these facts it follows, that a system of religion taught by such a character as Christ, confirmed by miracles, promulged by illiterate men, and opposed by the whole weight of intrigue, wealth and power; yet in spite of all opposition, to continue to spread and prevail till opposition itself was ashamed of the struggle. I say, such a system cannot be the contrivance and ingenuity

of men, but necessarily must be the dictate of divine wisdom itself. When we see the wisest men and greatest philosophers, such as *Locke*, *Lyttleton*, *Sherlock*, and *Newton*, after an investigation of which such men were capable, declare in its favor and cordially embrace its tenets, it would be nonsense to persist in the idea, that the son of a poor mechanic, without education, without interest, and without worldly influence, could conceive so sublime a plan, and push it through the world in the face of gibbets, racks, and flames, with no other aid to support it, but its own intrinsic merit.

What but the most complete conviction of its truth, could have gained such a powerful influence over the minds of men, as to induce them to meet ever death in its most terrific forms, rather than renounce their hopes in everlasting bliss, through the merits of their Lord; can the same thing be said of the followers of Tindal, of Hobbs, or of your favourite Middleton? where do you find it recorded, that men laid down their lives for the honour of Mars, of Juno, or of Neptune?—among none of the religious systems invented by men, can you find the characteristics of piety and true benevolence, that shine so conspicuous in the christian system.

The institutions of paganism were an idolatrous and political medley, adapted to the ignorance and superstition that then pervaded the world. Their influence was not to enlighten and purify the people for whom they were formed; but to impose on their credulity and perpetuate the vassalage and degradation that overwhelmed them. The Mahometan imposition which was enforced by the powerful arguments of fire and sword, was expressly calculated to foster ignorance and prejudice and servile obedience; and the countries now subject to its dogma's presents to us a gloomy picture of the extinction of every notion of liberty and literature.—But the religion of Christ breaks down the mounds superstition had raised; it unbars the doors of light and

knowledge, and we are astonished at the unfathomableness of divine wisdom, as it gradually unfolds to our view. It inculcates the insufficiency of wordly pleasures to satisfy the sublime conceptions of the human soul; that the frivolty of sublunary enjoyment debase and unfit the mind for the reception of that holy and celestial joy, that is reserved for those, who conform to the mild and the equitable requirements of the gospel; "set not your affections on the things of this world," but with meekness and reverence and love, seek the favour of the supreme, as the first and great object of your existence. Could man conceive an idea like this? no—all the boasted fine thoughts of the philosophers of Greece and Rome, dwindle into nothing, when compared to the sublimity of the conception.

Unless then the opposers of christianity can adduce any like testimony, that such a person as Jesus Christ never did appear, or if he did, that he possessed not the qualities ascribed to him—if I say, they so completely fail in substantiating the allegation, that the Messiah was an impostor, it is truly ridiculous and absurd to persist in denying the divinity of Christ, and the heavenly origin of his doctrine, when such a mass of incontrovertible testimony exist, that proves he was not an impostor, but led a life exemplary and holy, and agreeably to the prophecies and his own declarations, accomplished the great work "for which his father had sent him."

LETTER VIII.

RECAPITULATION.

SIR,

IN the preceding letters, I have not studied to meet your objections to revealed religion, in the order and arrangement you have adopted to invalidate the testimony of the prophets. You have principally animadverted on such passages as the Evangelists thought appropriate to particular circumstances that occurred in the life of Christ. The relevancy of those passages of the prophets which you deny, is the point in issue between you, eighteen hundred years after the event, on the one side, and the Evangelists, Apostles, and many hundreds of Jews and Gentiles who lived at the time, and were acquainted with all the circumstances of the case, on the other side; having canvassed the question on its merits, we will sum up the evidence, and leave the decision to the common sense and judgment of our readers.

The Evangelists, Apostles and thousands of Jews, and Greeks, and Romans of learning and distinction, who were well acquainted with the tenor and spirit of the prophecies, and many of them eye witnesses of the events that were alledged to be a fulfilment of them, after canvassing and sifting the subject with the most scrupulous nicety, were satisfied with their accomplishment in the person of Jesus Christ; hence they openly declared their conviction that he was the Messiah the prophets had spoken of, and that he must needs be the son of God, for that no other could possibly do the extraordinary things he did;—opposed to this, you assert without proof, that the prophets themselves were cheats, knew nothing of futurity, that Christ himself never did exist, and that the christian religion is all fable and alle-

gory !!! Your case certainly appears desparate on the face of it—but where must your hopes be, when the previous state of the question is examined ; when we recur to the nature and the extent of human intellect, and observe the incompetency of its powers to ascertain its duties towards the Deity, and at the same time discover the part designed by heaven for man to act, and consequently, that an immediate intimation from the Deity to him was absolutely necessary from the circumstances of the case ; can any one remain so stupid, as not to see, that men without such immediate aid, would have been doomed to grope their way through the devious track of a gloomy superstition, or abandon themselves to the blind caprice of a shapeless and frightful fatality.

That such are the necessary conclusions resulting from the supposition, that God had not conveyed his will to his creatures through the medium of special revelation, are most incontestibly proven by a retrospect of the state of religion among such nations as were not within the pale of God's immediate grace and protection. These as we have already seen, were as enlightened and learned as it was possible for human genius alone to reach. What do we find among the most rational and refined precepts of Pagan philosophy, “ Be useful to “ yourselves, and your friends, and your country : so “ shall ye be respectable while ye live, and honored when “ ye die.” This is the summit of mortal wisdom ; but ages must roll away, and then alas, how few will even arrive at this stage of knowledge, where the wisdom that is from heaven only begins.

Human reason, is indeed the only guide in matters pertaining to the narrow limits of human intelligence ; but what becomes of “ Omnipotent reason,” when we transcend the bounds of its little empire ? Can reason teach us any thing about the essence of matter, the growth of vegetables and the reproduction of corn or

fruit from a single grain? Can reason elucidate the connection between the body and the soul, and explain by what means material and immaterial substances are combined? Can it tell how anxiety and care can consume the body, or why disease and pain, impair the faculties of the soul? how the active powers of the mind are suppressed by sleep, and what terminates that suppression? In short, can our boasted reason account for the common and ordinary operations of nature, for instance, how the Sun can continue to pour forth such a flood of light, through a succession of ages, and yet retain its original quantity; If then our reason, that proud link in the chain of intelligent nature, is so incompetent to unfold the nature of visible and tangible objects, how futile, how ridiculous to pretend to explore the immeasurable bounds of universal creation;—How consummately absurd, for a creature who knows not how a grass springs into verdure, or a flower into bloom, to pretend to ascertain the nature and attributes of Jehovah, and his government of the moral and physical world;—at such folly angels must surely laugh, and demons grin, a grin of scorn.

If, sir, the boasted powers of human genius, together with such data as *the visible creation* afforded, had been sufficient to guide men to a right understanding of the Deity and his attributes, how will you account for the stupidity and gross conceptions, that we have seen in the preceding letters were entertained by generations of people, who of all others according to your notions, ought to have had rational ideas of a superintending providence. It is mere subterfuge in this case, to pretend with Voltaire, and Shaftsbury and others, that some of the ancient philosophers originally discovered the attributes of God from the manifestations of wisdom in his works, and were thence imparted to the leaders of Israel, and again modified and improved by the inventions of christianity. This ground, your wisest colleagues have ever found untenable, when assailed by men as well versed in ancient story and tradition as themselves;

their ordinary method therefore in *cases of pressure* has been, to make good their retreat from post to post, till driven from shelter behind the far-famed maxims and precepts of the Persian philosophers.

The celebrated *Kish Ibrahim*, &c. of Zoroaster, which have been termed the “sublime conceptions and deductions,” of that famous philosopher, has been considered the bulwark and last resort of infidelity. Let us for a moment examine the groundwork of this famous *sanctuary*, and see what kind of protection its votaries rely on. It has not been settled among the learned whether there were one or two persons of that name among the Persian priesthood. I think it of no consequence however, as it is agreed, that the latter one, if there were two, lived in the time of *Darius*, the son of *Hystaspes*. This Zoroaster undertook to reform the ancient religion of the worship of fire, and at the same time blended with his improved system the idea of one supreme being the creator of the world—the origin of the human race—their temptation of the spirit of darkness—and their consequent disobedience and fall. He also ordained many rites and ceremonies, corresponding with the Jewish ritual, used many phrases of the Hebrew scriptures, and mentioned the names of Moses, of Abraham, of Joseph and others of the Jewish leaders. I have too much confidence in your judgment and discrimination, to believe you can fall in the same absurdity, and think that the writer of the Pentateuch was indebted for information to the “sublime conceptions and deductions” of the Persian Lawgiver, who lived so many years after.

This Zoroaster, who, by the consent of the learned, lived in the time of *Darius*, resided at Babylon during the Jewish captivity, where he was instructed in the doctrines and practice of the Jewish religion under Daniel and other illustrious Hebrew doctors: he afterwards ingratiated himself in the confidence of the king, by whom he was advanced through the dignities of the priesthood,

till he attained the point of his ambition, the chief of the *Magi*. Having arrived at this pitch of honour and confidence, he successfully executed his favourite project of reformation; he lopped off some of the most glaring absurdities of the ancient superstition, and ingrafted in their place the portions of divine wisdom I have mentioned. This, sir, is the substance of the opinions of such celebrated men as Pocock, and Reland, and Prideaux, and the Abbe Foucher. On what then do the advocates for Deism found their pretension of support, in the "sublimity" they discovered in the doctrines of Zoroaster.

The most respectable writer who disagrees with the authorities I have cited, is *Anquetil*, who has immortalized himself by his indefatigable researches, as well as by his celebrated translation of the *Zend-Avesta*, and which himself acknowledges is replete with rhapsody and puerility. *Anquetil*, indeed did not allow that Zoroaster borrowed his religious improvements from the Hebrew code, because he says, that was confined to the remnant of a captive nation, and not generally known among any other; that his business at Babylon was to teach the mathematics and other sciences, where among his disciples at that time were *Pythagoras*, and other illustrious sages; still he acknowledges that Zoroaster there informed himself of doctrines which transported him and instructed him in the "origin of the human race, and the cause of the evils that oppressed them."

Is it reasonable then to suppose, that a man of the learning and genius of Zoroaster, and possessing the advantages of a residence in the capitol, should have remained ignorant of the religion and learning of a celebrated nation, then captive among them, and at a time too, when many of these captives were advanced to the first offices and employments in the state; when the predictions of their prophets were known and shewn to the king, and when the ordinances of Cyrus in favour of the Jews and their religion, were published and of notoriety

to the whole nation. With you, sir, I trust I need not urge the insufficiency of your reliance on the doctrines of Zoroaster any farther ; I am willing that an unbeliever shall enjoy all the strength of argument he can draw from the “ sublime conceptions and deductions ” of the Persian philosopher, in support of the “ authenticity ” and sufficiency of *Middleton's revelation*.

Thus it was with all the nations of the earth, who were not instructed by divine revelation, as we have already seen ; all were immersed in the gloom of idolatry and superstition ; devils, and buffoons, and monkeys, and toads, and every nauseous and disgusting reptile, were worshipped and idolized as beings of celestial order ; even with the intelligent and refined, their Jupiter shakes Olympus with his mirth and laughter, quaffs nectar and gets fuddled with debauchee deities, and kicks inferior gods out of heaven for interfering in his amours with some beautiful and blooming young goddess.

In this state of wretchedness and degradation, a sudden light breaks in upon the world in the person and official character of Jesus Christ ; the mists and delusions of superstition, gradually disappear ; life and immortality are brought to light, and men of education and science in amazement enquire, can a man live after he be dead ? New wonders continually open to their view ; the dead are to be raised ; a judgment is to follow, and the everlasting kingdom of glory beams in the distant prospect before them. These were truths to which reason was a stranger. “ Can a man enter the second time “ into the womb and be born again ? ” asked Nicodemus, burning to understand the things he heard. “ Do “ good to them that hurt you ; bless them that curse you, “ and pray for them that despitefully use you ; ” here were novelties indeed for a people who were trained to acts of cruelty and revenge, who were taught to wipe the stain of reproach, by plunging their daggers in the

breasts of their opponents ; who had heard such barbarities celebrated by their historians, and eulogized by their poets, and applauded in their theatres and senates.

The wisest institutions invented by men, were a mixture of religious and civil injunctions, calculated to perpetuate political oppression, as well as mental debility and superstition. But the refined and philosophic system of Jesus Christ, was not susceptible of a partnership with human policy ; “My kingdom is not of the world,” said the Messiah ; and when questioned with a view to this point by the Pharisees, who could not comprehend the purity of a plan, detached from emolument and honour, they were effectually silenced by that pertinent and judicious reply, give to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s, and to God the things that are God’s. Christ courted not the honours, the riches, nor the pleasures of the world ; but he undeviatingly pursued the original plan of his mission through hardships, and dangers, and death.

It is true, that fanatics and enthusiasts have suffered much, through obstinacy and pride, in support of the whims and absurdities they preached ; but we never heard of an enthusiast who made his own death an essential part of his pretended mission, and who during the agonies of assassination, prayed to God for a remittance of the punishment due to the crime of his murderers.

I am bold sir, to say, that you cannot in the whole scope of the christian scriptures, find any thing like the criteria of fraud and imposition ; on the contrary, the facts stated are all satisfactorily authenticated ; the matter on which the facts are predicated is rational and consistent ; and if an impartial investigation of the subject, fails to convince a mind capable of distinguishing between truth and falshood, we can only pity him, and hope that by continuing his researches a little farther,

he may at length emerge from the gloomy doubts and unbelief, into a lively hope and participation of those joys, that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath entered in the heart of [mortal] man to conceive."

