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An Essay concerning the Unity of Sense: to shew that no Text of Scripture has more than one single Sense. p. 481.

This is prefixed to Dr. Benson's Paraphrase on St. Paul's Epistles. St. Augustine, in the first Chapter of his twelfth Book contra Faustum Manicheum, says—Pauflus asserted that, after the most attentive and curious Search, he could not find that the Hebrew Prophets had prophesied concerning Christ; and Celsus, as it is related by Origen, introduced a law affirming, that the Prophecies, which were generally applied to Christ, might more fitly be applied to other Matters; other Enemies of the Christian name, in the first ages of the Church, strongly objected to the pertinency of adding the Old Testament Prophecies, as proofs that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah.

On the other hand, some of the ancient Fathers (not content with shewing, that a great many prophecies respect ed the Messiah, and received a direct and full accomplishment in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth) maintained that almost all the predictions and historical Events, mentioned in the Old Testament, had an indirect and typical relation to his advent, character, or kingdom.

Gro¬tius is said (though the fact may be questioned) to have been the first Interpreter of Scripture, who distinctly shewed, that the greatest part of the Prophecies of the Old Testament had a double sense, and have received a double accomplishment. He maintained that the Predictions, even of the Evangelical Prophet Isaiah, related in their primary and literal sense to the times and circumstances of the Jewish People, but that they respected the Messiah in a secondary and allegorical sense. Limborch, in his Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, accedes to the Opinion of Gro¬tius in these words—recte à doctissimis interpretibus observatum est, pauci¬cissa efficap prophetas vaticinium, qua directe et fenfu primo de Domino Jesu loquuntur; sed plerique duplicem inesse fensum, literalem unum, olim in typo imperfecte, alterum mysticum, in Domino Jesu plenè et perfecte impletum.

Father Baltus, a Jesuit, in the Year 1737, published his Difence des Propheties de la Religion Chrétienne; in this work he purposely examines and refutes the Opinion of Gro¬tius at great length; and shews that the most ancient Fathers of the Church, as Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Origen, &c. never thought of interpreting the Prophecies of the Old Testament in a double Sense; but applied them in their literal meaning to the Messiah. Whifton, in his Sermons preached at Boyle's Lecture in 1707, had supported the same sentiment before. Baltus: he strongly contended that "the Prophecies of the Old Testament at all appertaining to the Messiah, particularly those which are quoted as Testimonies and Arguments in the New Testament, do properly and solely belong to the Messiah, and did not at all concern any other person." In 1710, Arch-deacon Clagget animadverted on this notion of Whifton, and undertook the Vindication of those Christian Commentators who had explained some prophecies concerning the Messiah as not solely relating to him, in a Treatise, intituled, Truth defended and Boldness in Error rebuked.
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In 1724, Collins published, a Discourse on the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion, in which he revived the Objections of Faustus, Origen, and such other early writers against Christianity, as had endeavoured to prove that the Prophecies of the Old Testament had no direct relation to Jesus Christ. I refer the Reader to Leland's View of the Deistical Writers, and to Fabricius' Lux Evangelica, for an Account of the several Answers which were published to this and to another work of the same Author, intitled, The Scheme of literal Prophecy considered. Bishop Warburton also, in the sixth Book of The Divine Legation of Moses, has answered what Collins had objected against a second Sense of Prophecy: lastly, Doctor Forbin, not to mention some learned Authors who are still alive, and who have written very ably on Prophecy, has given us some very judicious Observations, both concerning Prophecy in general, and concerning a double Sense of some Prophecies, in the first Volume of His Remarks on Ecclesiastical History.
ESSAY

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The Unity of Sense; to shew that no text of Scripture has more than one single sense.

In all other authors besides the Scriptures, before we sit down to read and study them, we expect to find in them one single, determinate sense and meaning of the words; from which we may be satisfied that we have attained to their meaning, and understand what they intended to say.

Exod. xxi. 8. Moses is speaking of an Hebrew’s selling his daughter, for a maid-servant, to another Hebrew, and supposing that other Hebrew to marry her; and upon that he says, “If she please not her master, who hath betrothed her to himself, then shall he let her be redeemed.” The reading which we follow is in the margin of the Hebrew Bible. But, in the text according the Hebrew, it is, [“that he do not betrothe her”]. The learned commentator Mr. Ainsworth says, “That Moses, hearing it of God, did, by his spirit, write both [these readings]. And the margin is that which, in the Hebrew, is noted to be read. The Hebrew doctors [in Talmud. Bab. in Nedarim, c. 4. fol. 37. b.] say, “The words read, and not written; and written, and not read; “were the tradition of Moses, from [mount] Sinai;” i.e. as the Hebrew scholion on the place noteth, “So Moses received in Sinai, and delivered to Israel.”

Lev. xi. 21. There is a description of the things which were clean, and might be eaten by the Jews; and the text says [“such as have not legs”]; in the margin of the Hebrew Bible, it is [“such as have legs”]. The same learned commentator says, “Thus both readings were written by Moses.” Lev. xxv. 30. The Hebrew, in the text, reads [“The house, that is in the city, which hath not a wall”]. In the margin of the Hebrew Bible, it is, [“the house, that is in the city, which hath a wall”]. Where Mr. Ainsworth again contendeth “that the text is not corrupted, though we follow the marginal reading.”

The Papists have contended for the very same thing; and would have two different readings, in the Hebrew of the Old Testament, or the Greek of the New Testament, to support two senses; as if they were, both of them, the true sense of the text. [Vid. Spanhem. Chamier. contract. p. 236]. But doth not this appear very strange, that contradictory senses of a text should be both true; and that
these different readings, with contrary significations, should both proceed from God, or from the spirit of God?

Some of the Jewish rabbies have said "that the Scripture hath seventy-two faces." By which they mean that it may be interpreted many ways. For, under that expression, they comprehend those allegorical senses, which are as many as there are idle, fanciful rabbies to invent them. However, it is a common saying, not only among the Karaïtes, but also among the more judicious rabbies, "that the Scripture does not go beyond the literal sense," which the learned Aben Ezra professes always to embrace, scorning the seventy-two faces, or the allegorical and cabbalistic senses, which most of the Jews in the East superstitiously observe. [See Father Simon's Critical History of the Old Testament, b. III. chap. 8, or part 2d. p. 47. and his Animadversions on Vossius's Oracles of the Sybil, p. 283. Glaßii philolog. facr. I. II. p. 259.]

Augustin affirms, "that the same place of Scripture may be differently explained; and that the providence of God hath given those many several senses to the holy Scriptures." [See Father Simon's Critical History of the Old Testament, b. III. c. 8. p. 47.]

The following lines in Homer have been interpreted four different ways. [Vid. Horn. II. A. 306, 307.]

"Ως δὲ καὶ οὐραρτίῳ ἐπὶ τὴν ὑπὲρεχθέντα θάλασσαν καὶ ἐφ' ἐνεργοὶς ἐπιμένοι, ἐν μάζι μὲν θάνατος, ἐν αὐτῶν δὲ μαρτυρίαν ἔχουσιν."

Upon which passage, Mr. Pope's note is, 'The words in the original are capable of four different significations, as Eustathius observes. The first is, that whoever, in fighting upon his chariot, shall win a chariot from his enemy, he shall continue to fight and not retire from the engagement to secure his prize. The second is, that, if any one be thrown out of his chariot, he, who happens to be nearest, shall hold for his javelin, to help him up into his own. The third is, directly contrary to the last, that, if any one be cast from his chariot, and would mount up into another man's, that other shall push him back with his javelin, and not admit him, for fear of interrupting the combat. The fourth is followed in the translation, as seeming much the most natural; viz. that every one should be left to govern his own chariot; and the other, who is admitted, fight only the javelin. The reason of this advice appears, by the speech of Pandarus to Æneas, in the next book. Æneas, having taken him up in his chariot, to go against Diomede, compliments him with the choice either to fight or to manage the reins, which was esteemed an office of honour. To this Pandarus answers, that it is more proper for Æneas to guide his own horses, left they, not feeling their accustomed master, should be ungovernable, and bring them into danger. Upon occasion of the various and contrary significations of which these words are said to be capable, and which Eustathius and Madam Dacier profess to admire as an excellence, Monsieur de la Motte, in his late discourse upon Homer, very justly animad-"
verts, "that, if this be true, it is a grievous fault in Homer. For
"what can be more absurd than to imagine, that the orders given
"in a battle should be delivered in such ambiguous terms, as to
"be capable of many meanings? These double interpretations
"must proceed, not from any design in the author, but purely
"from the ignorance of the moderns in the Greek tongue, it
"being impossible for any one to possess the dead languages to such
"a degree, as to be certain of all the graces and negligences; or
"to know precisely how far the licences and boldnesses of expression
"were happy or forced. But critics, to be thought learned, attrib-
"bute to the poet all the random senses that amuse them; and
"imagine they see, in a single word, a whole heap of things, which
"no modern language can express; so are oftentimes charmed
"with nothing but the confusion of their own ideas."

Dr. Clarke, in his note upon these two lines of Homer, hath, with
great judgement, and with that critical skill in which he so much
excelled, endeavoured to support that which Mr. Pope mentions as
the third sense. But he agrees with Mr. Pope in condemning
Eustathius and Madame Dacier, for applauding this ambiguity, in
Homer, as profound and excellent; and says, ' The ambiguity
' ought by no means to be ascribed to the poet, but unto us, who
' are now less skilled in the Greek language; for the constant and
' peculiar excellence of Homer's eloquence is so great a perspicuity
' in his most laboured and beautiful verses, as no one ever at-
' tained in writing of prose.'

There is such another ambiguous passage in Homer [II. E. 150.],
which has been interpreted in three or four different senses. Eusta-
thius has there again commended the ambiguity. But Dr. Clarke
has made the same judicious remarks upon that, as upon the pas-
sage already considered.

Now, how exactly applicable are these things to the observations
of some divines? who, when they meet with a passage of Scripture
which is of more difficult interpretation, and which has been inter-
preted in divers senses, are ready to cry out (with Eustathius
and Madame Dacier), "Oh, the depth! oh, the fulness!" whereas
(with Monieur de la Motte) it might be answered, "If this be
true, it is a grievous fault. For what can be more absurd than
"to imagine 'that the doctrines, or rules of practice, which relate
"to men's everlasting salvation,' should be delivered in such am-
"biguous terms as to be capable of many meanings? These
"double interpretations must proceed, not from any design in the
"author, but from the ignorance of the moderns in the Hebrew
"or Greek tongue; it being impossible for any one to possess
"the dead languages in such a degree, as to be certain of all the
"graces or negligences, or to know precisely how far the licences
"or boldness of expression were happy or forced. But some di-
"vines, to be thought learned, attribute to the Scriptures all the
"random senses that amuse them; and imagine they see, in a single
"word or sentence, a whole heap of things, which no modern
"language
ESSAY CONCERNING LANGUAGE CAN EXPRESS; AND SO ARE OFTEN TIMES CHARMED WITH NO-THING BUT THE CONFUSION OF THEIR OWN IDEAS.

Sect. II.

IT is well known that several of the fathers interpreted the Scripture in a mystical sense, and were fond of that method of interpretation. Origen was very famous for this. Dr. Lightfoot [vol. I. of his Works, p. 373.] is clear in it, that the fathers took this method of interpreting Scripture from the Jews; and that seems to be at present the most common opinion of learned men among the Christians. But some, nevertheless, suppose that they rather took it from the more learned Heathens. And, since there is now extant but very little interpretation of Scripture, in the way of commentary, among the fathers, till the days of Origen, who has been justly styled "The father of the mystical interpreters," as being most eminent in that art, and who was much copied after by many other fathers, we shall now consider whence Origen derived that method of interpretation. The best account which we have of this matter is that given by Photius, the great critic of the ancients, who assures us, that Philo the Jew taught the way of allegorizing Scripture to the Christians. [Vid. Phor. Cod. 105.] Now, it is well known that Clemens of Alexandria, who cultivated this mystical art in all his writings, was the master of Origen. And, therefore, Origen is reasonably presumed to have learned it more immediately from him. And Clemens himself certainly derived it from Philo; whom he not only imitates, but transcribes very largely; as very plainly appears in the fifth book of his Stromata, and indeed elsewhere. But, though Philo was the great pattern of the mystical writers among the fathers, yet there is reason to believe that this way of expounding Scripture was of greater antiquity than Philo himself. [Vid. Philo. Jud. de vita contemplat. five de Therapeuta, p. 193. Paris. 1640. & Euseb. H. E. lib. II. c. 17.] In Philo's account Eusebius acquiesces, that the Essenes, or Therapeutæ, of Alexandria, had several very ancient books of their predecessors, or founders, full of allegorical interpretations of Scripture.

Le-Clerc [in his life of Clemens of Alexandria, English edition, p. 53, &c & Histoire. Eccle. p. 24, &c] thinks that allegories arose among the Heathens; and that their philosophers invented them, to render plausible their fables, or ancient histories of their gods; which, understood literally, appeared to be very gross and ridiculous: and that, when the Jews got acquainted with the Greeks, they admired and copied after their method of explaining religion; and made use of it with respect to the Scriptures of the Old Testament; which they by this means wretchedly abused. Clemens of Alexandria [Stromat. I.V.] intimates that that which chiefly induced him to believe that the Holy Scripture is full of allegories is, because the Egyptians and Greeks were wont to...
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*to represent the secrets of their philosophy under some emblems and fables.*

Bishop Smallbroke says, ‘The other account of the original of mystical interpretations of Scripture in the Christian church, or at least of the greater progress and improvement of it, is that which was anciently assigned by Porphyry, and he himself a celebrated allegorist. That philosopher [as cited by Eusebius, H. E. I. VI. c. 19.] affirms, that Origen was conversant in the writings of Cheremon the Stoic [who explained the Egyptian hieroglyphics]; and of Cornutus [a Stoic too, who adapted the Greek mythology to the knowledge of nature]; from whom he learned the art of allegorizing the Scripture, agreeably to the custom of the Greeks in explaining their mysteries. And to these he might have added the names of Plato, Numenius the Pythagorean, and several other mystical writers, whom Origen seemed to have studied much on this very occasion. This is in some measure confessed by Jerome [Ep. ad Magnum], when he tells us, † that Origen, in his ten books of Stromata, confirmed all the doctrines of our religion, out of Plato, Arisotle, Numenius, and Cornutus.” And, indeed, most of these writers, with others of a like nature, are mentioned in Origen’s commentaries, and in his treatise against Celsus, as authors that he was intimately acquainted with, and who may, therefore, be supposed to have had some influence on his mystical expositions of Scripture, which bear some resemblance to those that were used by themselves. It is very obvious that Origen indulged Platonic notions to an excessive degree. Cornutus and some other explainers of the Greek mythology (out of great numbers of ancient authors on that subject which have entirely perished) are extant at this day. And these seem in several respects to have been imitated by Origen, in his application of their art of mystical exposition to the interpretation of the Scriptures themselves. So that it is by no means improbable, that Origen copied after both Jewish and Gentile writers, of the mystical kind, in allegorizing the Scriptures. And no wonder that there was such a coincidence of the two assigned originals of the mystical exposition of Scripture in a person who, by his vast (but irregular) wit, was peculiarly suited to the nature of mystical expositions; and, by his uncommon learning, knew so well how to support the most lively, though frequently ill-grounded, imaginations. And it need not be here observed that the example of so great a genius, as that of Origen, was imitated much by many of the fathers.

Origen’s fondness for mystical interpretations led him sometimes to speak of the literal sense of Scripture in a very degrading manner, and with too great contempt. But he did not absolutely deny the reality of the literal sense, though he gave the preference to the mystical.’ [See Bishop Smallbroke’s answer to Mr. Wollston, vol. i. p. 93, &c. Glassi Phil. sacra, p. 255]. Origen did sometimes plead for a threefold sense of Scripture; and so did Jerome. Nay, Augustin pleaded for a fourfold sense of Scripture. [Vid. Glassi Philolog. I i 3]
These manifold senses tended to confound the understandings of the common people, made them doubt whether the Scriptures had any fixed and certain meaning at all, and made them more cold and indifferent about finding out and retaining the one true sense; which alone deserves any regard.

The two most learned and celebrated fathers, who imitated Origen, and ran into the mystical interpretation of Scripture, were Jerome and Augustin. But what their sentiments of this method of interpretation were, in their more judicious and riper years, will plainly appear from what follows. Bishop Patrick, in the preface to his Paraphrase on the Psalms, says, 'I have forborne a great many mystical and allegorical senses of the words, and rather adhered to the literal meaning, though accounted trivial and vulgar by many men, who had rather indulge to their own fancies, than be at the pains of making a diligent inquiry after the truth.

For, whatsoever is pretended, it is not the eabiness and meanness of the literal sense, which hath made it to be despised, and been the cause of allegorizing the Scriptures, but the great difficulty and labour that is required to the finding of it out in many places. St. Jerome and St. Augustin confess as much, who spent their youth in mystical interpretations, as more easy studies; but, when they grew old, applied themselves to historical explanations; which St. Jerome (in his preface to the prophet Obadiah) confesses he did not understand, when he wrote upon that book in his youth; and, in plain terms, ingenuously acknowledges those mystical interpretations were the work of his childish wit; at which he blushed and hung down his head, even when others cried them up to the skies.

But the historical explanations (which he then set out) were the work of his mature age; when he had at least profited thus far, as to know, with Socrates, 'that he was ignorant. In short; he begins that preface with the words of the apostle, 'When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but, when I became a man, I put away childish things;' and hopes this would excuse him for interpreting that prophet allegorically, in the heat of his youth, whose history he did not know.

St. Austin acknowledges as much [in his first vol. of retractions, chap. 18.] which I will not transcribe, but only set down the words of Martin: Bucer, one of the first reformers, upon the sixth of St. Matthew, where he says, 'That it would be worth a great deal to the church, if, forsaking allegories, and other frivolous devices, which are not only empty, but derogate very much from the majesty of the doctrine of Christ, we would all, simply and soberly, prosecute that which our Lord intended to say to us.'

What Arnobius has said, concerning the uncertainty and small authority of the allegorical interpretations of the pagan mythology, will hold as strongly against the allegorical interpretation of Scripture.
But whence is it evident to you, when you explain these allegories, that, in your interpretations of them, you have the fame sentiments that the writers of history, relating to them, had in their own thoughts, and which they did not express in the words suitable to their proper sense, but to figurative significations? — Another mystical writer may fancy a more probable and ingenious sense than yourselves. A third may discover another meaning. And a fourth, a different one from all three. And, according to the qualifications of the several interpreters, every thing may be explained, with an infinite number of pretended expostitions. For, when all allegories are taken from things dark and concealed, and do not aim at any certain end, who can immovably fix one's opinion of the thing itself, which is treated of? Everyone is at liberty to affirm his own conjectures to have been originally designed. And, if this be the case of allegories, how can you draw any thing certain from what is in itself uncertain; and assign to it any one unalterable significations, when an infinite variety of expostitions may be equally drawn from it? [Vid. Arnob. adv. gent. lib. V. p. 181. edit. Lugdun. Bat.].

Maimonides [More Nechoch. p. 473. Bat. 1629.] gives us the opinion of the Jewish rabbies concerning allegorical interpretations of Scripture: Our rabbies are wont, as it is well known to those that are acquainted with their usual practice, to be mightily delighted with allegories, and to use them frequently; not that they are of opinion that the allegorical interpretation is the true sense of Scripture; but that it has somewhat enigmatical in it, that is pleasant and entertaining. [See Bishop Smallbroke's answer to Mr. Woolston, vol. I. p. 121, &c.].

Sect. III.

The Cocceians, which are a numerous party in Holland, contend for a mystical interpretation of every part of scripture. And many of our divines have too much given into this. Even the learned and judicious Dr. Clarke has given double senses of several passages in the four gospels. I will mention an instance or two. Math. xx. 1, &c. He contends for the double sense of the parable of the labourers, who were hired into the vineyard at different hours of the day, who all at last received equal wages. Which is just and true, when applied to the Gentiles, who were admitted to the privileges of the professed people of God, many ages after the Jews; and yet were set upon a level with them, as to the privileges of the Messiah's kingdom. But it does not seem, by any means, just, when applied to men who repent at different parts of life. For, if one man keep the commandments of God for twenty or thirty years; and another keep them, with the same care and diligence, only for the last ten years of his life; this man cannot be intitled to an equal reward with the former; neither will God at last make them equal. For he will render unto every man exactly according to
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to their deeds. Again; this parable is not to be applied to men's receiving their different rewards at the day of judgement; in as much as some are represented as murmuring that other should be made equal with them. For, at the day of judgement, there will be no mourning among the righteous; but every mouth will be stopped, and every mind fully satisfied, by the reasonableness of the divine proceedings in that day.

Dr. Clarke's applying the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew's gospel, ver. 6, &c. both to "the destruction of Jerusalem," and to "the day of judgement," shall be taken notice of hereafter. I omit many other instances of double senses, in Clarke's paraphrase and notes on the four gospels—but I look upon such double interpretations as the principal blemish in that excellent work. Indeed, if the Dr. had given two senses of any text, only where he was dubious, and left it to his reader to judge which of them was the true sense of the place, I should have had no objection. But his expressing two senses of the same passage, and contending for both of them as the true sense of the place, is what I apprehend to be liable to very great and just exception.

The celebrated Mr. Locke, who has shewn us the way how to study the epistles, and, in his admirable preface, has quoted a passage from the learned and judicious Mr. Selden, to shew that no text of Scripture has more than one meaning, which is fixed and limited by the connection;—yet that same Mr. Locke was so far carried away with the torrent, as, in some few instances, to contend for double senses of one and the same text. 2 Cor. iii. 6. St. Paul, having had occasion mention to the recommendatory letters, which the false apostle had procured in his own favour, written with ink; he then rises higher, and speaks of the two tables of stone, on which were engraven, by the finger of God, the ten commandments, a summary or principal part of the law of Moses. But he prefers to both of them, the gospel, written or engraven upon the hearts of the Corinthians by his ministry; written, not with ink, but by the Spirit of God, who illuminated the apostle with the plan of the gospel-revelation, and enabled him to work miracles, as a proof of his divine mission.—These things led St. Paul to call the laws of Moses, "the letter;" and the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, "the spirit." And he declares, that though, without inspiration and miracles, the apostles could not have been sufficient of themselves to have found out the gospel, or to have spread it as they did; though they could never have thought of such a thing of themselves; yet their sufficiency was of God, who made them able ministers of the New Testament, or covenant; "not of the letter," or law of Moses; "but of the spirit," or gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. "For the "letter killeth;" the law of Moses condemneth all offenders to death, without mercy. "But the spirit giveth life;" the gospel promises immortal life to all sincere penitents, and habitually holy persons. [See ver. 7, 8, 9.]

Now,
Now, though this appears to be the just interpretation of that text, and exactly agreeable to Mr. Locke's second note on ver. 6. and to his note on ver. 9. yet his first note on ver. 6. runs thus, "[Not of letter, but of the spirit.]. By expressing himself, as he does here, St. Paul may be understood to intimate that the New Testament, or covenant, was also, though obscurely, held forth in the law. For he says, he is constituted a minister of the spirit, or spiritual meaning of the law, which was Christ (as he tells us himself, ver. 17.), and giveth life; whilst 'the letter killeth.' But both letter and spirit must be understood of the same thing; viz. the letter of the law, and the spirit of the law. And in fact we find St. Paul truly a minister of the spirit of the law, especially in his epistle to the Hebrews; where he shews what a spiritual sense ran through the Mosaic institution and writings."

Now from hence it appears that Mr. Locke was of opinion, that the law of Moses, besides the literal sense, had a spiritual meaning, which could not be discerned without inspiration. Whereas, by "the letter," is not meant the letter of the law of Moses, or of the gospel of Christ; nor by "the spirit," the spirit of the law, or the spiritual meaning, either of the law or the gospel. But, by "the letter," is meant the Mosaic constitution, or the law of Moses; a summary of which was originally written upon two tables of stone. And, by "the spirit," is meant the gospel; which was originally revealed and confirmed by the spirit. And what St. Paul had been saying led him to make use of these terms.

Mr. Locke has again had recourse to a double sense of Scripture, in the allegory, Gal. iv. 21, &c. which shall be considered hereafter. I do not mention such instances, from Dr. Clarke or Mr. Locke, from any dislike I have to those two excellent persons, whose names and memories I very highly reverence. But, when such great names can be alleged to patronize what is apprehended to be wrong, no reverence for their names and memories should hinder us from contending for what we apprehend to be true and right.

**S e c t. IV.**

There are several sorts of persons, who would be pleased with double senses, and glad to have the truth and authority of them established and confirmed.

(1.) All mystical divines and enthusiasts plead for double, or manifold, senses of the holy Scripture; and greatly delight in texts that are more difficult, and consequently more flexible; because they can more easily bend such texts to their humours or fancies, inclinations or wishes; and prove, or establish, doctrines by them, which could otherwise never be proved, or established.

'Of the ancient cant, we have a remarkable example in the account which Irenæus gives of the Valentinian heretics, and their Æons; who also informs us of the art, as well as the subject, of their cant [Lib. I. c. 1.]. He tells us, they applied the parables
parables of our Saviour; the discourses of the prophets, and the
sayings of the apostles, to quite other purposes, than they, who
first used them, ever intended them. And this those Heretics did
by changing and transposing the passages of Scripture, till the
words bore the sense which they imposed upon them.

This Irenæus compares to the practice of one, who should dis-
solve the comely picture of a king, made in bugle-work, and, out
of the same strings of bugles, should frame the picture of an ill-
favoured dog or fox; and, after such a change, should pretend
this new shape is the original picture of the king which the artist
made; and impose that belief upon the ignorant and foolish.

After the same manner, did the Valentinians deliver their fables
and errors in the words, phrases, and parables of Scripture.

This artifice, as he says again [p. 56.], is like theirs, who should
take any subject that occurs, and describe it in verses borrowed
out of Homer, and should pretend that this is part of a poem of
his. As he gives an example in one, who represents Hercules,
as sent by Euritheus unto Cerberus, in such verses as he there
sets down, out of the Iliad and Odyssey.

We have a fuller instance of this in Alexander Rofs his Vir-
gilius Evangelizans, or the history of our Lord Jesus Christ de-
scribed in the words and verses of Virgil. By the same kind of
application, that Rofs made Virgil an evangelist, George Fox and
others have made St. Paul, and the rest of the writers of the New
Testament, Quakers. And, by the same art, any one author may
be made to deliver the doctrine of another. Aristotle may be
taught in the words of Moses: and the religion of the Jews may
be represented in the words of Aristotle.

But this is so gross and notorious an abuse of Scripture, as no
serious Christian can judge excusable or tolerable: [See Dr. Je-
ney’s Collections of Tracts, vol. 1. p. 342, &c.]

(2.) The Papists contend for many senses of holy Scripture;
because that would help them greatly in the proof of a number of
their peculiar tenets. From hence they would infer the obscurity
of the holy Scripture, and term it “a nose of wax,” that might be
turned any way, and unfensed letters, which have in themselves
no meaning, but may have a meaning put upon them, just as the
church of Rome fees proper. [See Archbishop Tillotson’s rule of
faith, part II. § 2. and elsewhere, (Psal. Philog. sacr. lib. II.
p. 254.) Hence they would infer the necessity of a living, visible,
insalible judge of controversies; and that the Scriptures should be
taken out of the hands of the common people, who are incapable
of understanding them, and in great danger of perverting them.
Hence they would prove many things, which could not be other-
wise proved; such as the power of the keys, the insalibility of the
church, purgatory, transubstantiation, communion in one kind, aur-
icular confession, extreme unction, &c. &c. &c. [Vid. Spanhem.
Chamier. contract. lib. XVI. c. 10. p. 605.] Whoever has a
mind to see the popish arguments for double or more senses of
Scripture,
Scripture, with the answers of the Protestants, may consult Spanheim's Chamin. contract. p. 237, &c.

(3.) The Jews are highly delighted with manifold senses of Scripture. There has, indeed, been among them a sect, called Karaites, who were for a literal and just interpretation of Scripture. But that has ever been an unpopular sect, and hated by the Rabbies, and by the Jews in general.

The Rabbies, (as has been already observed) assert “that the Scripture has seventy-two faces.” And the Rabbies are the popular, learned men among the Jews, who are had in the highest esteem and veneration. The Jews, therefore, cannot but be pleased to see Christians imitating their Rabbies. And, indeed, I know of nothing that could so effectually cover the Jews from the attacks of Christians, or harden them in their infidelity, as the giving into double interpretations. For a Jew might argue thus with a Christian, who allows double senses. 

Suppose your Messiah has come, and fulfilled the prophecies in one sense; the Messiah, whom we expect, may come, and fulfil those very prophecies in another sense.

And why may not we, Jews, take the sense of the prophecies which we like best; as well as you, Christians, take the sense of them which you like best, especially as you yourselves allow that the prophecies are fairly capable of more senses than one?

I do not know what solid reply such a Christian could make to a Jew, who should argue in that manner. Nay, if another Messiah should come, and answer the present opinion and expectation of most of the Jews; yet such, as would not receive him, might argue in the same way for the coming of another:—and so on without end.

(4.) The enemies of revelation are glad to see Christians pleading for double senses; because it affords the greatest advantage to them, and their cause. What a poor figure would Mr. Collins's two books make, if the prophecies were interpreted in their one, true, and proper signification; and all the mystical, double, senses of them were denied, and rejected by Christians! What indecent rhodomontade would Mr. Woolston's discourses on our Lord's miracles appear to be, if you take away the mystical, allegorical interpretations, and explain them in their just and literal meaning! Whenever the author of "Christianity as old as the creation” is pinched with the reasonableness of the literal sense of Scripture, he has recourse to a mystical, allegorical interpretation; and then, to support that, he, in a very ridiculous manner, cries out, “The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.” The author of "Christianity not founded in argument” would presently be struck dumb, if you denied double senses; and would not allow him to fix his own fanciful, and even contradictory, interpretations upon texts of Scripture at his pleasure. And all the little dealers in infidelity fly to this refuge, when the one, true, sense of Scripture is so apparently reasonable and excellent, that they have nothing to object against it.

Considering these things, methinks it is high time for Christians in general to be upon their guard, and not give way to double interpretations;
Words, without a fixed meaning, convey no doctrine; and in effect contain no revelation at all. Antecedent to one's opening the Bible, if one was told that it was a revelation from God, one would expect that the doctrines essential to salvation should be expressed clearly; because men are concerned to understand and believe them: that the rules of practice, or the precepts of an holy life, should have a single and determinate meaning; because men are concerned to understand and practice them. For, if their sense were dubious, the practice formed upon them could not be steady and uniform. The promises should be clear and express; because they are to influence men as motives to obedience; and the threatenings should be intelligible, and their meaning fixed, because they are to deter men from sin and disobedience. The rules of divine worship ought to be express and determinate, and the language of our worship clear and intelligible; otherwise, we might as well worship in an unknown tongue. For all divine worship ought to be entirely in subordination to moral virtue, or true holiness. And it cannot influence God in our favour, unless it influence us to an holy temper and life. But what has no certain meaning cannot be expected to edify us, or to have any good and proper influence upon us.—The sacred history should be plain and intelligible; because it relates the most interesting events, events of public concern, and great importance to mankind.

We justly condemn the answers of the Heathen oracles, as riddles, dark and obscure, vague and indeterminate, capable of being turned many ways, without certainly knowing which sense was intended, or in what way they are to be understood. But divine prophecies should be intelligible, and have one determinate meaning; that it may be known when and how they are accomplished.—We admire it as an excellence in Homer, and other celebrated writers of antiquity, that their meaning is expressed clearly; and may not we expect, when God speaks to men, that his meaning should be expressed in as clear and determinate a manner?

In one word, if the Scriptures are not to be interpreted, like the best ancient authors, in their one, true, and genuine meaning, the common people will be led to doubt, whether or no the Scriptures have any certain meaning at all. They will be for ever at a loss what to believe, and what to practice, upon what to ground their comfort here, and their hope of everlasting salvation hereafter.

By all that has been said, I would not be understood to intimate, that all texts are to be interpreted alike. No! general expressions must contain a number of particulars under them; though particular expressions must be confined and limited to particular cases. All texts are not to be interpreted in the literal sense; nor all texts in the allegorical or figurative sense.—What I contend for is, that every text has only one meaning; which when we have found, we need enquire no further. Literal passages ought to be interpreted literally; figurative passages, figuratively. Historical narrations are
to be understood historically: and allegorical passages ought to be interpreted allegorically. In parables, the fact is nothing, but as it illustrates, or inculcates, the moral, or application. In figurative, or allegorical, passages, the thing alluded to, in the figure, or allegory, is only to enliven or illustrate what is said. And he would act as unreasonable a part, who would interpret figurative expressions literally; as he, who would interpret literal expressions figuratively. The obvious and grammatical, or the rhetorical and figurative, sense of the words, the time and place, the character and situation of the speaker or writer, and the relation which any passage has to his main view, or to the connection, will, in most cases, lead an interpreter easily to distinguish history from parable or allegory, and literal representations from such as are mystical or figurative. And the judgement of a true critic, or faithful interpreter of holy Scripture, will very much appear therein. But fancy and imagination are boundless; and no rules nor limits can be set to them.

S E C T. V.

The prophecies have been thought to favour double senses the most of any part of holy Scripture. But, perhaps, upon examination, they do not really require or admit of such an interpretation. Dr. Sykes [in his Connection between natural and revealed Religion] has a whole chapter, to shew that the ancient prophecies contained only one single sense. And that chapter I would recommend to the reader's perusal.

Some particular passages I would now consider.

(1.) If the second and sixteenth Psalms can be shewn quite throughout to agree to king David; then they ought to be interpreted of him. But if (as some judicious persons have thought) there be in them some expressions, which are not applicable to king David, then they should be interpreted wholly concerning the Messiah: to whom they do in every part very well agree.

(2.) The seventy-second Psalm has generally been applied to king Solomon, but some have thought that it was a prophecy of the Messiah; and that there are, in it, passages which were not applicable to king Solomon. If so, then I apprehend the Psalm ought not to be applied to him at all. For, if the interpretation will not go through, that very circumstance seems to be a plain proof that the interpreter has set out wrong. Some of the ancient Jews were of opinion, that several things, in this Psalm, belong more properly to the Messiah than to Solomon. And Theodoret, in his interpretation, supposes that king David, in this Psalm, prophesies of nothing else but the Messiah; and that he hath no respect to Solomon. The passages, which could not belong to king Solomon and his subjects, are such as these, [ver. 5. “They shall fear him, “as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations.” Ver. 7. “In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance “of peace, so long as the moon endures.” Ver. 11. “Yea all
Essay concerning "kings shall bow down before him, all nations shall serve him."

Ver. 17. "His name shall endure for ever; his name shall be con-
"tinued, as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in him.
"All nations shall call him blessed."

As to the passages, which have been thought inconsistent with the
Psalms being a prophecy of the Messiah, "Ver. 1. He is called
"a King, and the king's son"). But was not our Lord a king?
and "the son of him, who is King of kings, and Lord of lords?"

Or, by "the king," some may understand David himself; and, by
"the king's son," his great descendent, the Messiah. [See Mat. ii.
1. and xxii. 42. Mark xi. 10.]. Though the Chaldee interpreteth
"the king" to be Christ. And several, that interpret the Psalm of
Solomon, suppose that he is called both "the king" and "the king's
son." Ver. 15. "Prayer, also, shall be made for him continually;
"and daily shall he be praised." The former part of this verse has
been thought to be an objection against interpreting the psalm of
the Messiah. Some, indeed, have understood it of praying before,
or to, him. But is not prayer made for him continually; when
his disciples daily pray, "Thy kingdom come." "May the king-
dom of the Messiah be set up, where it is not; and have more in-
fluent, where it is already set up!" Is not this praying for the
Messiah? or for the enlargement and success of his kingdom;
which is, in this psalm, so beautifully described, as a kingdom of
truth and righteousness? The latter part of the verse ["daily shall
"he be praised"] is most applicable to the Messiah, our blessed
Lord and Saviour. And I do not see anything in that psalm, but
what exactly suits his great and glorious character.

(3.) The famous prophecy, Isai. vii. 14. quoted by St. Matthew
[ch. i. 22, 23.], has been thought to contain a double sense. Or
else, St. Matthew's application of it (as it is supposed) cannot be
vindicated. It has been said, "that Isaiah spoke the words, not of
the Messiah, but of his own child; whose birth of a young
woman was given as a sign, that Jerusalem should be delivered,
before the child should be able to speak plain. The prophecy,
then, being literally fulfilled in the prophet's days, it is forced
and unnatural to fix a figurative, which is another, interpretation,
upon the text."

But this objection will appear to have no foundation, when it is
considered that the prophecy was originally and literally intended
for our Saviour's miraculous birth; and literally accomplished in
that remarkable event: and that there are in reality two predictions
or prophecies delivered in that chapter, viz. one concerning "the
house of David," which should not be then destroyed (as king
Ahaz and his people were afraid); but continue till the Messiah
came, who should be born of a virgin. And the other prophecy
was, that king Ahaz's two enemies should, in a few years, be de-
stroyed; and unable to molest him, or his kingdom, any more.

Ahaz, king of Judah, was then in the utmost distraction at the
invasion which threatened Jerusalem, his capital city, from the two
neighbouring
neighbouring and confederate kings of Syria and Israel. To com-
fort him in this conjuncture, Isaiah is sent of God, with a message
to king Ahaz, to let him know that their counsels and attempts
should prove ineffectual.

Isa. viii. 18. The prophet himself informs us, "Behold I, and
the children, whom the Lord hath given me, are for signs and
for wonders in Israel, from the Lord of hosts, who dwelleth in
mount Zion." And accordingly he is ordered [Isai. vii. 3.],
to go and meet king Ahaz in such a place; and to take with him
Shear-jashub, his son." And, when the prophet came up to the
king, carrying his little boy in his arms, or leading him in his hand,
for a sign, as God had commanded him, he found the king and
his nobles viewing the walls of the city under the utmost dejection.
"For his heart was moved, and the heart of his people," at the
rumour of the confederacy, "as the trees of the wood are moved
"with the wind." [Ver. 2.]. And the prophet would have com-
forted them with the divine message which he brought. To that
end, he compared the two hostile kings to two firebrands, who
should smoke, but never burn; and foretold the speedy fate of their
kingdoms. But king Ahaz and his nobles seem to have paid lit-
tle regard to the divine message. Then the prophet spoke again
to the king, and offered him the choice of any sign, in the depth
beneath, or in the height above. But king Ahaz, in a sullen
humour, refused to ask any sign. And he and his counsellors
despised the prophet, and distrusted God. Since then king Ahaz him-
self refused to ask any sign, and the house of David was so greatly
moved and affected, God, by the prophet, said, "Hear ye now, O
houte of David, I will give you a sign, ' Behold, a virgin shall
conceive, and bear a son; and shall call his name Immanuel,'
that is, God with us. The line of David, therefore, shall not
be cut off, till this remarkable event happen, and the Messiah be
borne, in a miraculous manner, and of a pure virgin."

Now this is a literal prediction, and was exactly accomplished,
some hundreds years after, in the person of our blessed Lord; the
only person, to whom such a prophecy can be literally applied.
And this prophecy is addressed, in the plural number, to the house
of David.

The following is a distinct prophecy, addressed to king Ahaz, in
the singular number; and has a particular regard to him and to
his danger at that time. The prophet Isaiah, pointing (most pro-
bably) to his son, Shear-jashub, whom God had commanded him
to bring along with him, and constituted a sign unto Isarel;—point-
ing (I lay) to his own son, who was present, though very young,
he said, "Butter and honey shall he eat; that he may know to re-
fuse the evil, and choose the good: [that is, this child shall partake
of the peace and undisturbed plenty of the land]. Surely; because
this child [יְהֹ֖וָ֥ן banachar] shall know how to refuse evil, and
choose what is good, the land, which thou, O Ahaz, abhorrest,
shall be forfrozen of both her kings. In other words, a year or
two's time shall deliver you from all your fears."
Here then are two distinct promises or prophecies. Both of them literal; and both of them in due time literally accomplished.

To shew that the prophet's own son was, most probably, in the latter prophecy, intended and pointed at; let it be observed, (1.) That here is the He emphatic, or demonstrative, prefixed to the word Nachar: and it is said [Hanachar, This child]. (2.) As much must be supposed, in the interpretation of other passages of Scripture, as that of the prophet's laying his hand upon his son, or pointing to him; or shewing, by some action at the time of speaking, that he meant his own son. So, when our blessed Lord declared “that one of his own disciples would betray him;” Peter beckoned to John, to ask who it was? Then John, leaning near the bosom of Jesus, and speaking softly to him, said, “Lord, “which of us is it?” Jesus replied, softly and so as St. John alone might hear, “He it is, to whom I shall give the sop, when I have “dipped it.” And presently, dipping the sop, he gave it openly to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon [John xiii. 21, &c.]. So again; when our Lord had driven the buyers and sellers out of the temple, and cleansed that holy place, the Jews were displeased, and said, “What sign do you shew, that you do these things?” What proof “do you give of a prophetic, or extraordinary, mission; that you “take upon you to do such extraordinary things?” By way of answer, our Lord is commonly and justly supposed to have pointed to his own body; or to have laid his hand in a solemn manner upon his breast, to intimate that he was speaking of his own body; though, in allusion to the temple, which he had just cleansed, he calls it this temple;—using such an action (I say) our Lord answered, “De- “stroy this temple; and, in three days, I will raise it up again.” [John ii. 13, &c.]. (3.) Unless you suppose that Isaiah laid his hand upon his own little son, or pointed to him, when he spoke to the king, the divine order for taking his son along with him [ver. 3.], will have no meaning; but be an idle and superfluous circumstance in the history of these remarkable prophecies.

After I had fixed upon this interpretation of the two prophecies, Ifai. vii. 14, &c. I found that Bishop Chandler had mentioned it, and said some very proper things in support of it. And [in his Defence of Christianity, p. 329.] he hath this marginal note. "Since I writ this, I find the most learned Archbishop Usher, in his annal [A. M. 3262] to be in the same opinion; viz. that the prophet spoke of two children. And, when he passed from Emanuel to Shear-jashub, he demonstrated him with his finger. Malvenda, also an interpreter of the first rank, applies what Isaiah has said [ver. 15, 16.] to Shear-jashub."

Bishop Chandler goes on in the following manner: "The original word Alma, as learned men have proved, signifies constantly a "virgin untainted by man *. The Greek translators before Christ,

* "Alma, non solum puella, vel virgo, sed cum lege virgo aedeaconda dicerat & secreta, quam nuncquam virorum patuerit speciebus; sed magnâ parentum diligendâ custodita fuerit. Lingua quaque Punicè, quæ de Hebraorum fortibus emanser dicitur. "proprie virgo alta appellatur." [Hieron. comment. in Is. lib. III. c. 7. F. Simon's Critical Hist. of the New Testament, Part II. p. 43.]"
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"who were not interested in the controversy, and who knew better the signification of Hebrew words than any Jew since their last dispersion, render alma so in this place. And the prophet must dis- appoint his hearers exceedingly, after so pompous an introduction, and so important a name, to mean no more at last, by a virgin's conceiving, than that a young woman should be with child.

"What! doth Isaiah offer Ahaz a miracle in the heavens, or on the grave? And, when he seems to tell them that God, of his own motion, would do a greater work than they could ask, does he sink to a sign, that nature produces every day? Is that to be called a wonder (an uncommon, surprizing, supernatural event), which happens constantly, by the ordinary laws of generation?

"How little doth such a birth come up to the solemn preparation, which Isaiah useth, to raise their expectation of some great matter? 'Hear ye, O house of David;—behold the Lord himself will give you a sign,' worthy of himself. Well, what is it? 'Why, a young married woman shall be with child!'—Their patience would not have lasted to have heard him out. They muft have thought that he came to insult their misery, rather than to com-fort them under it.

"From considering, therefore, the occasion and the importance of the message, the weight and the force of the words in which it was delivered, they and we ought to understand that the birth here foretold did not relate to an ordinary child. St. Matthew, "after Jesus was so born of a virgin, had good reason for writing, "that then this [remarkable] prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled."

(4.) Some may suppose that another instance of double senses may be found, Matth. ii. 15. Jesus fled into Egypt, "until the death of Herod; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, 'Out of Egypt have I called my son.' Which words are found, Hos. xi. 1. but they relate evidently to the nation of Israel, and are not a prediction of what was to come, but an historical account of what was past long ago. 'When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and 'called my son out of Egypt;'

—they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images, &c.' Now, it may be thought by some that "calling our Saviour out of Egypt" was the mystical, spiritual meaning of these words, intended by the prophet Hosea, or by the Spirit of God which inspired him; though the literal sense referred to the nation of Israel.

But, if they are no prophecy in Hosea, St Matthew's quoting the words cannot make them a prophecy. Nor is there any reason to think that St. Matthew understood them as a prediction.

Whoever is acquainted with the Jewish phraseology, or manner of quotation, knows very well, that they sometimes declared "such or such a saying to be fulfilled," when the words were mere accommoda-tions, or could properly express their meaning. It is true; that manner of speaking sounds oddly in our language. But we must remember that they did not write in English; and that every nation
has its own idioms, phrases, and forms of expression. [See Dr. Sykes's Essay upon the truth of the Christian Religion, p. 206, &c.]

There were four ways, in which the Jews used this or the like expression ["such a prophet's words, or such and such texts of Scripture, are fulfilled"]. (1.) They sometimes meant by it, that the prediction of a prophet was literally accomplished. (2.) That the cases were parallel, or a similar event happened; or that there was a remarkable agreement, in several circumstances, between former and later things. (3.) That a general rule, or saying, was applicable to a particular case. Just as we say, upon several occasions, "The old proverb is made good." Or, "the old saying is verified." (4.) The Jews often used such expressions, when they meant no more than "that the words of Holy Scripture, or of some ancient prophet, might be aptly accommodated to the case in hand; or were very proper to express their present meaning." Passages from Jewish authors might be alleged to confirm this. And the rule for us to examine any such text by is plain and obvious. "Go to the place referred to. Examine it according to the rules of grammar or rhetoric, and as it stands in connection. From thence we may gather its original meaning in the Old Testament; and easily see how it is quoted in the New Testament."

From such an examination it plainly appears, that the words of Hosea, as quoted by St. Matthew, are a mere accommodation; and alleged only to express the present event. And there can be no reason mentioned why St. Matthew, who was a Jew, might not express himself in their usual forms.—But that need not lead us into any difficulty; nor is this passage any proof of a double sense of Holy Scripture. The expression had but one sense in Hosea; and it has only one sense, as made use of, by the evangelist St. Matthew.

(5.) Our Lord's celebrated prophecy [Matth. xxiv. 1—35.] does not relate to the day of judgement; but to the destruction of Jerusalem; and to that alone.

The reason why it has been supposed that our Lord is there speaking, at all, of the day of judgement, is what is said, ver. 27—31. "that the sun shall be darkened, and the moon not give her light, and the stars fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be shaken. Then shall appear the sign of the son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn. And they shall see the sign of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet; and they shall gather together his elect, from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

"The coming of the son of man" does, indeed, very often signify his coming to the judgement of the last day. But, by "the coming of the Lord" is, in some texts of Scripture, meant his coming to inflict any great and remarkable judgement, either immediately, or by any of his creatures [See on James v. 8.]. And "his com-
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ing, in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory," is a
plain allusion to Dan. vii. 13, 14. which bishop Chandler judici-
ously applies to our Saviour's, receiving the investiture in his new
dignity at the hands of God, or the entering upon the exercise of
his universal and everlasting kingdom. "Clouds are a known
symbol of heaven, and of divine power and majesty. And the
ascribing this symbol to one like the Son of man is a declaration
of "the supreme magnificence, and authority, which God shall
give that Son of man, the Messiah:" faith that eminent Jew,
Saadiah Gaon." [See Bishop Chandler's Defence of Christianity,
p. 128, &c. Pearson on the Creed, Art. 7, p. 293. Mr. Lowman
on Rev. i. 7.] Sir Isaac Newton likewise [in his Chapter of the
Prophetic Language] says, 'The heavens, and the things therein,
signify thrones and dignities.—And riding on the clouds is put
for reigning over much people.' Our Saviour, therefore, in pro-
phetic language, foretells that all power should be given unto him,
both in heaven and upon earth; and, when destruction was coming
upon his enemies and murderers, then should all the tribes of the
land mourn, and see evident signs of Jesus's being invested with
great power and glory; which he would make use of, to take ven-
geance on his enemies, and to deliver his own people out of their
distresses.

It may be further observed, that at the last judgement the stars shall
not literally fall from heaven, nor the general conflagration reach
beyond this globe and its atmosphere. Dr. Clarke has very well
paraphrased ver. 29. "For, immediately after these fatal wars, and
the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, the whole Jewish
polity, government, laws, and religion, shall be utterly destroyed."
And Sir Isaac Newton, in his chapter of the prophetic language,
confirms Dr. Clarke's interpretation. For he says, that, 'in sacred
prophecy, the darkening, smiting, or setting of the sun, moon,
and stars, is put for the ceasing of a kingdom, or for the desola-
tion thereof, proportional to the darkness. Darkening the sun,
turning the moon into blood, and falling of the stars, for the
same.'

Ver. 30, 31. "And then it will become evident, that Jesus was
the true and only Messiah. And then shall all the tribes of the
land [of Israel] lament and mourn, and be forced to acknow-
ledge the power, and glory, and majesty, of Christ, who will send
forth his apostles into the world, who (as it were with the
sound of a trumpet) shall gather into one body all those that be-
lieve and obey his gospel from all the nations of the earth."

If Dr. Clarke had stopped here, I apprehend that his interpreta-
tion would have been just. But he then proceeds to apply the same
passages to the day of judgement, notwithstanding our Saviour's ex-
press declaration, "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not
pass away, till all these things are fulfilled." As if he had said, "All
that goes before relates to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the
desolation which is coming upon the nation of the Jews. I have
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"In no regard, in all that I have hitherto said, to the general judgment of mankind at the last day; but to events which shall all come to pass before this generation shall pass away."

To take away the force of this argument, some have supposed that υμεῖα signifies not an age, but a nation. [See Mr. Joseph Mede's Works, p. 752. Brennii amica disputat. cum Jud. p. 90:.] And that, here, it denotes "the Jewish nation, which should not perish till all these things were fulfilled." But υμεῖα signifies an age, in very many places of the Septuagint. So "one generation" signifies "one age." Psal. cix. 13. Ecclef. i. 4. Isa. xxxiv. 17. "Another generation" signifies "another age," or "the children that should rise up after them." Deut. xxix. 22. Jud. ii. 10. Psal. xlviii. 13. and lxxviii. 4. 6. and cii. 18. and cxlv. 4. "From generation to generation" signifies "from age to age." Isa. li. 8. Lam. v. 19. Dan. iv. 34. Joel iii. 20. "All the generation" signifies "all the men of that age." Num. xxxii. 13. Deut. ii. 14. "The fourth generation" signifies "the fourth race, or succession of men, from the time then present." Gen. xv. 16. Job xlii. 16. "The tenth generation" signifies "the tenth age, or race of men, from the time then spoken of." Deut. xxiii. 3. "A thousand generations" signifies "one thousand ages." Psal. cv. 8. "Many generations" signifies "many ages." Psal. lxi. 6. Isa. lixii. 12. and lx. 15. Joel ii. 2. "All generations" signifies "every age." Psal. xlvii. 17. and xlvi. 11. and lxxxv. 5. and lxxxix. 1. and xc. 1. and c. 5. and cii. 24. and cvii. 31. and cxix. 90. and cxlxxv. 13. and cxlv. 30. And "this generation" signifies "this age," or "this present race of men." Gen. vi. 5.—More such authorities might be collected from the Seventy.

In the New Testament, "a generation" signifies "one age." Matth. i. 17. Luke i. 48. 50. Acts xiii. 36. and xiv. 16. and xv. 21. Eph. iii. 5. Col. i. 26. And "this generation" signifies "this age." Matth. xi. 16. and xiii. 41. 42. 45. and xxii. 36. Mark viii. 12. 38. Luke vii. 31. and xii. 29, 30, 31, 32. 50, 51. and xvii. 25.—More such authorities might be collected from the New Testament. Now, why should not υμεῖα [a generation] be taken in its usual signification in this place; especially as, in that sense, it contains a plain answer to the question of the disciples? But, if it be interpreted of the Jewish nation, it is no answer at all.

Our Lord had just been talking with some of his disciples concerning the demolishing of the buildings of the temple, which were strong and magnificent. And they asked him, "When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"

It is possible that the disciples might think that these events would come to pass at or near the same period of time. But, though they might be confused in their notions concerning the time, and imagine that these events would happen together, or very soon after one another, our Lord appears to me to have considered them as two
two questions, and to have answered them separately and distinctly, Ver. 4—35. he answers the first question, viz. "When shall these things be? i.e. When shall the temple be destroyed, so that one stone shall not be left upon another? When shall such a desolation come?" To that our Lord answers, by setting before them several of the signs and tokens of its approach; and by describing the desolation itself. And then adds, "This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall sooner pass away, than any of my words fail of being accomplished." But what answer to that question would it be to say, "The Jews shall continue a distinct people down to the day of judgement, or to the end of the world?" Or, according to Mr. Mede, "The nation of the Jews shall not perish till all these things be fulfilled?" What answer (I say) would that be to the question put by the disciples? or how would such a declaration connect with the preceding or following context? Ver. 32, &c. Our Saviour intimates, that some of his disciples should live to see the signs and forerunners of that desolation, which was coming upon the Jews. And accordingly he says, "Now learn a parable from the fig-tree. When its branch is yet tender, and it putteth forth leaves, then you know that summer is near. So also ye, when ye shall see all these things, know ye that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away." Now, what connection has the Jews continuing a distinct people throughout all ages with the signs and forerunners of that amazing desolation? or with the rest of our Saviour's discourse in that place? Ver. 36, &c. Our Saviour proceeds to answer their other question, viz. "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" And his answer, with respect to the time of his second coming, and of the world, is, "But of that day, and hour, knoweth no person, no not the angels, but my father only." Dr. Clarke's note upon this 36th verse is, "It is an extraordinary ingenious conjecture of Grotius, to make [ἡμίπα ἦσιν, that day] here opposed to [ταῦτα ἄρα, all these things], ver. 34. So that the sense may be, ταῦτα ἄρα, the destruction of Jerusalem shall be presently. But ἡμίπα ἦσιν, the last day of judgement, is known to none." Indeed, I would propose it as a much more just division, that the 25th chapter of St. Matthew's gospel should begin at what is now the 36th verse of the 24th chapter. For that would preserve a proper connection with what is at present the beginning of the 25th chapter; in which it is said, τότε, "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, &c." And yet no period of time is assigned when that shall be. Whereas, if, from Matth. xxiv. 36, &c. our Lord is speaking of the day of judgement, and of
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the end of the world, it may very properly be said, "Then shall the
kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, &c."

Upon the whole: our Saviour's discourse [Matth. xxiv. 1—35] relates to what was to come to pass, " during that generation.
And, therefore, must relate to "the destruction of Jerusalem" only, and cannot relate to "the day of judgement, and to the end of the
world." In the former sense, it was fully accomplished, and does not now remain to be accomplished.

(6.) By raising Lazarus so publicly from the dead, Jesus increased the number of his disciples [John xi. 46, &c.]. This alarmed the chief priests and Pharisees, who thereupon held a council, and deliberated what they should do. "For (said they) if we let him go " on thus, all the nation will believe on him; and, taking him for " the Messiah, they will set him up for their king. Upon which " the Romans will come and take from us our country; and that " share of power and government which still remains among us." And yet, on the other hand, if they had rashly apprehended Jesus, and put him to death; and it had, after all, appeared that he was an innocent person, that also might have proved of dangerous consequence.

Upon hearing them debate thus, and observing that they seemed at a loss to know what to resolve upon, Caiaphas, who was one of the council, and also high priest that year, standing up, said, "You " know nothing at all; nor consider, that it is expedient for us, " that one man should die for the people; and that the whole na- " tion perish not."

Concerning which speech of Caiaphas, the evangelist adds, "This spake he, not of himself; but, being high priest that year, " he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation. And not " for that nation only; but that he should also gather together into " one the children of God who were scattered abroad. Then, from " that day forward, they took counsel together to put him to " death."

Now this speech is alleged as a passage which contains a double sense, and requires a twofold interpretation. But in whose design were the words intended to convey a double meaning? If we regard the intention of Caiaphas, it is plain he designed to say, "that " one man had better suffer death, whether he was innocent or no, " than that the whole nation of the Jews should perish."—The Holy Spirit prophesied by the mouth of wicked Balaam, and by the mouth of the false prophet, who deceived Jadan, and led him to transgress the divine command, which occasioned his being slain by a lion. And the same spirit of truth and power could easily cause Caiaphas to pronounce a prophecy in words whose just meaning and propriety, and full extent and comprehension, he did not understand. Accordingly, the Spirit of God had but one single meaning to the words, viz. "that Jesus should die as a sacrifice for " the people; i.e. for the nation of the Jews; and not for that " nation only, but for all mankind. And that he might gather " together,
The Unit of Sense.

Together, out of all the nations of the earth, the dispersed servants of God, into one holy church, united under one head, which is Christ Jesus; and joined together in one holy communion and fellowship; in the profession and practice of one faith and worship. — So that, in Caiaphas's intention, the words had but one signification. And, in the intention of the Holy Spirit, they had but one signification. And the intention of the Spirit is mentioned by the evangelist; otherwise we should not have known that that meaning was to be affixed to the words.

(7.) I will mention another passage; which, though not a prophecy, yethas been thought to contain a double sense. The passage is, Deut. xxv. 4. "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox, when he treadeth out the corn." Which St. Paul applies thus [1 Cor. ix. 8, &c.] to prove that ministers ought to be supported by those to whom they preach the gospel. "Say I these things as a man? [Do I argue thus, from the principles of mere natural reason only?] Doth not the law say these things also? [Yes, it doth, in effect, say so]. For, in the law of Moses, it is written, "Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox, that treadeth out the corn." Now, doth it not say this chiefly for our sakes? For our sakes it was certainly written, that he, who plougheth, should plough in hope; and that he, who thresheth in hope, should be partaker of his hope." From hence it has been inferred that this, which the apostle hath mentioned, was the allegorical sense of what Moses had said. And that, besides giving a law about oxen, Moses intended thereby to intimate "that they, who preach the gospel, should live by the gospel." But what occasion is there for that, when the apostle's argument is good without it? If the ox, which treadeth out the corn, is ordered to be unmuzzled, that he may eat of that, about which he labours; a fortiori, the ministers of the gospel of Christ should not be denied a support from that about which they labour. Thus the law of Moses afforded St. Paul an argument to his present purpose. And it is a very good one. But it does not appear, that Moses, in that law, had any regard to the securing a maintenance for those who preach the gospel of Christ.

(8.) Gal. iv. 21, &c. St. Paul, having related the history of Abraham's having Ishmael, by Hagar; and Isaac, by Sarah; adds, as in our translation, ver. 24. ["Which things are an allegory"]. Mr. Locke's paraphrase of these words, is, "These things have an allegorical meaning." Whereby it is intimated, "that, besides the literal sense, the Mosaic history of Abraham and his family had also a spiritual, mystical, or allegorical meaning; or that, in the intention of Moses, or of the Spirit of God which inspired Moses, the same passage in that history had two meanings; the one, a plain, obvious, and literal meaning; the other, an hidden, obscure, mystical, or allegorical meaning: that God originally intended, that, by these two women, Sarah and Hagar, should be prefigured the two covenants; viz., that of the law of Moses, and..."
that of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; and that, in the secret meaning of the Mosaic history, he had intimated as much.'

Whereas St. Paul was far from saying or intending any such thing; as the learned author of the Dissertation, annexed to Mr. Pierce's paraphrase and notes on Philippians, has made abundantly appear. The sum and substance of what is there said is, "The proper translation of the words, ver. 24. 'Ἀνεύ ἐσιν ἀλληγοριάτες,' that is, 'which things are allegorized;' that is, the history of Moses, concerning Abraham and his family, is 'allegorized' by the prophet [Isa. liv. 1]. And, in the prophet's allegorical discourse, the two women, Sarah and Hagar, represent the two covenants, or the two dispensations, of the law of Moses, and the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Now, what occasion is there to suppose a double sense in that part of the Mosaic history? We may take a passage out of Rapin's History of England; and allegorize that, if we please. But that would not by any means prove that Rapin himself, besides the literal, historical sense of such a passage, intended also that allegorical meaning; or, besides the literal sense, comprehended the use and signification to which we apply his words. In the book of Moses, called Genesis, the historical, literal sense, of the account of Abraham and his family, is the one, true sense. In Isaiah's allegory, the one true sense is the allegorical sense. That allegorical sense has St. Paul quoted from the prophet. And, therefore, the one true sense of the words, as used by St. Paul, is not the historical or literal, but the allegorical sense.

Sect. VI.

Object. 'Have not divines, and other writers, in all ages of the church, used the words of Scripture by way of allusion or accommodation; turned history into allegory; and often used texts at their pleasure in a very different sense from that of their primary signification? And would you condemn so general a practice? have authors keep rigidly to the one true sense? take away all the ornaments of style, and spoil so much fine writing? How soon would the orator be struck dumb? What a poor figure would the man of elocution make, if your one true sense must always be found out, and strictly kept to, throughout the whole discourse, founded on any particular text of Scripture?

Answer. I should be sorry to offend the orator, or strike the man of eloquence dumb. But I am considering what is required in a commentator. And it seems to be his business to find out the one, true sense of Holy Scripture; and to set it before his reader in as clear a light as he can. However, it might not be amiss for preachers to attend a little more to the one, true sense of Holy Scripture than is frequently done. And that it would not spoil their...
their eloquence, but increase and exalt it, was the opinion of one who will be allowed to be a very good judge. [See the archbishop of Cambray's Dialogues on Eloquence, English edition, p. 158.]

It mangles the Scripture to shew it to Christians only in separate passages. And, however great the beauty of such passages may be, it can never be fully perceived, unless one knows the connection of them. For every thing in Scripture is connected. And this coherence is the most great and wonderful to be seen in the sacred writings. For want of a due knowledge of it, preachers mistake those beautiful passages, and put upon them what sense they please. They content themselves with some ingenious interpretation; which, being arbitrary, has no force to persuade men, and to reform their manners.

P. 159. 'I would have them at least not think it enough to join together a few passages of Scripture that have no real connection. I would have them explain the principles and the series of the Christian doctrine; and take the spirit, the style, and the figures, of it: that all their discourses may serve to give the people a right understanding and true relish of God's word, there needs no more to make preachers eloquent.' For, by doing this, they would imitate the best models of antient eloquence.'

And again, p. 161. 'It is here that our preachers are most defective. Most of their fine sermons contain only philosophical reasonings. Sometimes they preposterously quote the Scripture, only for the sake of decency or ornament. And it is not regarded as the word of God, but as the invention of man.'

Thus far the eloquent Monsieur Fenelon, archbishop of Cambray.

Let me further add, that the true eloquence of a preacher is to make the people wise unto salvation; that the one, true sense of Holy Scripture will do more towards this, than all the eloquence of Tully or Demosthenes without it; and that, however fine allusions, accommodations, allegories, and figures of rhetoric, may be, yet they can only serve to embellish and illustrate the truth. They cannot prove anything. That must be done by the one, true sense of the various texts alleged. And can be done no other way. And, when they have done that, I have no objection to their making use of allusions, accommodations, or allegories, in order to embellish their discourses, or illustrate the truth, provided they do not insist upon them as the original and true meaning of such passages of sacred Scripture.

Object. II. "Several texts of Scripture are difficult; and it is dubious which is the true sense: must you not there allow of double senses?"

Answer. When a difficult text is considered, and the person, who attempts to explain it, is dubious which is the true interpretation, he may very rationally give all the senses which carry any appearance of probability, with the reasons for each interpretation, and leave it to his readers, or hearers, to judge which is the true sense. But, in that case, there is but one true sense. And his not being able to ascertain
ascertain what that is can be no proof of the text's being originally intended to have more significations than one.

Object. III. "Do not you allow of types and shadows? or that persons and actions, under the Old Testament, were types of Jesus Christ, or of something under the Christian dispensation? And, if you allow of types, you must allow of double senses in some texts; or that some passages of Scripture, besides their immediate and direct meaning, had also a further, i.e. a mystical or typical significations."

Answer. I acknowledge that God was the author of both dispensations, viz. "the law of Moses," and "the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:" that, before he put either of them in execution, he had the plan of both clear in his own mind; that in several things there is a resemblance between them; and that God not only foresaw that resemblance, but also intended it; that, wherever the law or the prophets have declared, that the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic constitution were intended to point out a moral obligation, or to prefigure the Messiah, or something in the Christian dispensation, there that moral intention, or prophetic presiguration, is the one, true sense of the text. But, where neither the law, nor the prophets, have pointed out such an intention, there the resemblance between the two dispensations could not be discovered till the events, which bear a resemblance to former things, were come to pass. Then, indeed, such a similitude would illustrate such events; intimate that the two dispensations had one and the same author; and facilitate the spread of Christianity among the Jews. But discerning that resemblance between the two dispensations must arise from having them both before us, and comparing the one with the other; and not from the double sense of any text of Scripture in the Old Testament or in the New.

As to types, in the common acceptation of that word, there were several under the Old Testament. [See Isai. xx. 1, &c. Jer. xiii. 1, &c. and xviii. 1, &c. and xix. 1, &c. and xxiv. 1, &c. and xxvii. 1, &c. and xxviii. 10, &c. and li. 63, 64. Ezek. ii. 8, &c. and iii. 1, &c. and iv. 1, &c. and v. 1, &c. and vii. 23. and xii. 1—20. and xxvii. 1, &c. Hos. i. 2, &c. and iii. 1, &c. Zach. xi. 7, &c.]. In this sense also our Saviour's cursing the barren fig-tree was typical of the destruction of the nation of the Jews, who had leaves, but no fruit, made a great show and profession of religion, without bringing forth the fruits of holiness and righteousness. [Matt. xxxi. 18, &c. Mark xi. 12, &c. with which compare Luke xiii. 6, &c.]. And so was Agabus's taking up St. Paul's girdle, to bind his own hands and feet, in order to foretell that the apostle should be so bound at Jerusalem. [Acts xxxi. 10, &c.]. In all these cases, it is evident that the design was, by such persons, things, or actions, to prefigure such and such future events. And the typical sense there is the one, true sense of the place; as any one may see by examining the several passages with any tolerable care and attention.
Obje. IV. "Are not many passages in the New Testament taken from the Old Testament, and used in a quite different sense from what they have as they stand in the original writer? And must not these be called double senses of the words of sacred Scripture?"

Answer. It is acknowledged that our Lord, and his apostles and evangelists, have taken several passages from the Old Testament; and used them in a very different sense from what they have as connected with the place from whence they were taken. But that will not prove a double sense of the words. I may quote a passage from Homer or Virgil, Herodotus or Livy, to express my present meaning, and in quite another sense from what it has in those ancient authors. But that will not prove that those ancient authors intended their words should be understood in two senses. In the original intention, they had only one meaning. In my accommodation of them, they had only one meaning. And, though the same words may have different ideas affixed to them, and be used by successive speakers or writers in various senses; yet that does not prove that, in the original intention, they had more than one signification.

Obje. V. "Is not the epistle to the Hebrews a strong proof of double senses? And has not the author of it abundantly shewn, that in the spiritual meaning of the law of Moses was contained the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ?"

Answer. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews has argued very justly; as will plainly appear, when the design of his writing is attended to, and his argument clearly understood.—The Hebrew Christians were in danger of apostatizing from the gospel, and of returning to the Jewish religion again. And they were induced to that change, partly out of fear of persecution from the unbelieving Jews, and partly by the subtile arguments which they alleged. Besides proper arguments to support them under persecution, or the prospect of it, the apostle answers the arguments of the unbelieving Jews, and that very solidly, q. d. 'You prefer the law of Moses as more excellent than the gospel of Christ. But let us compare them together, and see wherein they resemble one another, and wherein they differ. And from such a comparison it will appear, that, in both respects, the gospel has the advantage. And will you go back from a better dispensation to a worse? Was the law given by angels? The gospel was given by our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the head of the angels, and to whom they are all in subjection. Was Moses, the servant of God, the great Jewish lawgiver? A greater and more excellent person, Jesus, the son of God, is the great Christian lawgiver. Did Joshua give the people of Israel rest, after they had passed through the wilderness; and settle them in the land of Canaan? That was not the final rest; for king David spoke of another rest long after; even the final rest of God's people, which Jesus will give us in the heavenly Canaan, and which is perfect, and durable. There remaineth, therefore, that everlasting rest for the people of God.—Had the Jews a succession
succession of mortal men for their high priests? Jesus Christ is
our great high priest, and is not succeeded by any, but has an un-
changeable priesthood; a priesthood which resembles not that
of Aaron, but of Melchizedek, who was both king and priest of
the most high God, who is not represented as coming of any
priestly descent, nor as succeeded by any priestly line. In like
manner, Jesus Christ is actually both king and priest, not de-
scribed from any priestly line, nor has he any successor in his high
office and dignity.

Have the Jews had a tabernacle, or temple, in which their
priests used to minister? Jesus Christ is gone into the holy of
holies; and is a minister of the true, the heavenly, tabernacle, or
temple. The law had only the shadow, the rough draught, or
imperfect delineation, of good things to come. The gospel has
the substance, and contains those very good things themselves.

Did the Jews offer the sacrifices of bulls and goats? Jesus Christ
has offered himself as a sacrifice; and, by that one offering, has
perfected for ever those that are sanctified.—In short, whereas-
soever the law of Moses and the gospel of Christ resemble one an-
other, there the gospel has the preference: whereassoever they dif-
fer; there also the gospel is more excellent. And would any
wife man go from a more excellent dispensation, to one that was
evidently much less excellent?

All this must be allowed to be very just reasoning. But wherein
does it favour double senses, or double interpretations, of Holy
Scripture?

Objection. VI. "What! would you limit the wisdom and power of
God? When God speaks to men, he can take in a large com-
pass, and can easily comprehend more in one sentence, or one
word, than short-sighted, mortal men can do in a whole volume
of the most profound, elaborate, or comprehensive writing!"

Answer. The matter now in debate is not what God can do, but
what he has done. Whatever God can do; whenever he has made
a revelation to men, he has always seen fit to reveal his mind and
will in such a familiar, condescending manner, as to use words and
phrases in the sense in which they were commonly used at the
time, and in the place, where such a revelation was first given.
And, indeed, if he had done otherwise, men could not have un-
derstood him. And revelation not understood would be no revelation
at all.

But this objection may be turned just the other way; and it may
be said to them that make it, "What! would you limit the wisdom
and power of God? When God speaks to men, will you repre-
dent him as speaking with the obscurity or equivocation of an
Heathen oracle? Cannot he speak the language of any age or
country in so clear and intelligible a manner as to have one cer-
tain and determinate meaning, so that his words may be un-
derstood, and his will complied with? Will you allow Homer or
Herodotus, Xenophon or Livy, to express themselves clearly and
distinctly?
distinctly? And cannot the wisdom and power of God equal, or
excell, the most plain and intelligible of all the writers of anti-
quity? What method, therefore, can now be taken to interpret
any passage of Scripture; but to consult the original; to examine
it according to the rules of grammar, rhetoric, and close atten-
tion to the age and country, customs and language, of that time
and place; the character of the speaker, or writer, and of the
persons addressed to, or spoken of; and the scope and connection
of the whole discourse?

When God speaks to men, he certainly knows how to speak to
their apprehensions. And such is his goodness, that one may
reasonably expect that he will do so.

Object. VII. "Do not you too much confine the sense of the
sacred writings? and suppose the design and meaning of the
apostles to be less general than it seems to have been? Or, in
other words, do you imagine that the apostollic epistles were
written only for the use of the churches, or persons, to whom
they were addressed, or to whom they were first sent? Or how far
do they concern Christians in all ages and countries whatever?"

Answer. I look upon this to be a question of very great moment,
and which deserves a most careful consideration.

All the books of the New Testament (except the Revelation of
St. John) seem at first view to have been merely occasional writ-
ings; designed for some particular persons, or churches, or, at the
most, for some particular countries.

The Revelation of St. John, indeed, does not seem to have
been an occasional writing. For that apostle was, by the divine com-
mand, ordered to write in a book what was then revealed to him.
And, I am sorry to say it, many Christians have exceedingly slighted
that book; notwithstanding the express order which the apostle had
to write it; and the divine declaration at the beginning of that
book [Rev. i. 3.]; "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear,
the words of this prophecy; and keep [or observe] the things
which are written therein;" and the solemn execration, denounced
at the end of the book, against those who shall add to it, or diminish
from it [Rev. xxii. 18, 19.]. The difficulty of some parts of that
book may have discouraged many from studying of it. And others
may perhaps have been induced to slight it, from the prophane and
petulant observation of a divine of a four wit in the last age; who
has been pleased to call it "a mysterious, extraordinary book;
which perhaps the more it is studied, the less it is understood;
"as generally finding a man crackt, or making him so." [See
South's Sermons, vol. II. p. 467.]. Surely, a most indecent way
of speaking of any part of sacred Scripture!

St. Matthew's gospel is said to have been written for the use of
the Jewish Christians, more especially in Judæa; to leave among
them, when the apostles were going to preach among the Gentiles.
The gospel of St. Mark was written at the request of the brethren
at Rome; and more immediately for their use and benefit. St.

Luke's
Luke's gospel, and the Acts of the apostles, seem to have been the first and second part of the same book, inscribed to Theophilus, and perhaps written, at his request, to inform him of the first beginnings of Christianity, and of the progress which it had made. And Theophilus is thought by some to have been governor of a province in Greece; or some great man whom St. Luke had converted to the Christian faith.

St. John's gospel was written at the request of the Christians at Ephesus; and as a supplement to the other three gospels. And the several epistles were evidently written to particular churches, or persons, as occasions then required, and more peculiarly suited to their circumstances.—So far were the books of the New Testament occasional writings.

But, if St. Matthew's gospel was written in Hebrew, for the use of the Hebrew Christians (as some suppose), it must have been translated for the use of the Hellenist, and Gentile, Christians. And the present Greek does not carry any marks of a translation. St. Matthew, therefore, might possibly publish it both in Hebrew and Greek. But, however these things be, as it was published in Greek, it must have been designed for the benefit of Christians in general. And, if the brethren of Rome requested it of St. Mark to write his gospel, and had it first, others had it afterwards. And it became of public benefit to the Christians in general; for whose benefit it was calculated, as well as that of St. Matthew's.—St. Luke's inscribing his gospel and the Acts of the apostles to Theophilus might possibly be no more than our dedicating a book to some person of eminence; when the book is, nevertheless, intended for the use of the public.—St. John's writing his gospel at the request of the brethren at Ephesus, and that as a supplement to the other three gospels, is a plain proof that the other three gospels were then common among the churches, and well known to the Christians; that St. John's gospel was intended to be as public; and, finally, that the primitive Christians were not indifferent about what their Lord had said and done, but had an ardent desire to know as much as they could with certainty of the doctrine, life, actions, and sufferings, of that dear and eminent person.

The apostolical epistles were not circular letters, addressed to the Christian church, or to all Christians at large; but were, undoubtedly, written upon some particular occasions; and addressed to some particular churches or persons. But they, nevertheless, spread into other churches; and were valued and read by other Christians. St. Paul expressly ordered some of his epistles to be read publicly; and that not only in the churches to which they were written; but also in other churches.—St. Peter had read the epistles of his beloved brother Paul; not only those written to some of the churches in Asia minor, but to other churches also.—It was, doubtless, with a view to their being known and distinguished from any epistles, which might be forged under his name, that St. Paul wrote the salutation with his own hand, at the end of all his epistles.

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The Jews, in our Saviour's time, are said "to have had Moses and the prophets." May not we as justly be said "to have the evangelists and apostles," in having their writings so common among us? Christians in former ages had these sacred writings in the highest veneration; read them privately in their families and closets; and publicly in their churches; spread them far and wide through the earth; and handed them down to us as a public treasure, designed for the benefit of Christians in all ages and nations.

In the essay on inspiration annexed to 1 Timothy, I have observed that the apostles had the whole scheme of the Christian doctrine by divine illumination; and constantly retained it during the remaining part of their lives. What, therefore, they preached or wrote concerning the Christian doctrine may be depended upon; whatever was the occasion of their so preaching or writing. If Jesus Christ and his apostles had not first preached and worked miracles, met with such opposition or success, acted or suffered, as they did, the sacred historians could not have had the facts which they have recorded in their writings; nor the Christian religion have been attended with that illustrious evidence, which now appears in the books of the New Testament. Besides, there are not wanting some hints of their epistles being designed for general use. For instance: the first epistle to the Corinthians is directed, not only to the Christians in Corinth, but "unto all, who, in every place, invoke " the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours." And there is no question, but that every one of their epistles were intended to be of as extensive benefit as they were capable of.

The four gospels and the Acts of the apostles seem to contain all the essential parts of the Christian religion. But the epistles contain things useful, and of very great moment. The excellent laws, which Solon gave the Athenians, contained the substance of all their laws: but yet the Athenians found it proper to add many particular laws, as elucidations of Solon's general rules.—The laws of the twelve tables at Rome contained, in a narrow compass, the substance of the Roman law: but they found it requisite to add many particular laws to illustrate and explain those of the twelve tables.—The ten commandments contained the sum and substance of the Mosaic law: but yet God saw fit to add many particular precepts, to explain and inforce the observation of the ten commandments.—And, finally, " the law of Moses" contained the rules of the Jewish religion and government; but yet God saw fit, by the prophets, from time to time, to give that nation many particular precepts for inforcing, explaining, and illustrating the law of Moses.—In like manner; the four Gospels and the Acts of the apostles contain a summary of the Christian doctrine and precepts. They direct us to believe in God; and in Jesus Christ, as the Messiah and Saviour of the world. They inculcate the necessity of repentance, where men have done amiss; and of prevailing holiness in all. But they do not always apply these general directions to particular cases so minutely and circumstantially as do the apostles in their epistles.
The four Gospels give an account of the ministry of John Baptist, and of our Lord, of the twelve apostles and of the seventy disciples; with what they said and did as preparatory to the setting up the kingdom of the Messiah in the world. The Acts of the apostles contain the history of erecting the gospel-kingdom. In the Epistles, several things are cleared up, which are but briefly hinted in the Gospels and Acts of the apostles. They were written by different persons at various times and upon different occasions; and yet they all agree in the doctrines and precepts; and confirm the main facts, viz. that Jesus died and rose again, ascended into heaven, and poured out the spirit; and thereby imparted the knowledge of the gospel unto mankind; and many miraculous powers in attestation to the Christian doctrine.

It might be expected that the religions, which had been long in possession, would obstruct the progress of the gospel; and that the votaries of each would have their peculiar objections. Accordingly, we find in the epistles that the Jews and Heathens did actually make such objections; and we see also in what manner the apostles have answered them; and that the nature of the gospel and its evidences were such, and so glorious, that it speedily made its way against various and powerful opposition. The first professors, and more especially the first preachers, of the gospel, might expect persecution from several quarters. The Acts of the apostles, and their Epistles, inform us that they were actually persecuted; and let us know how they behaved, and what supported them under such hardships and indignities.

By having Christianity set in such different lights; and the objections of those who first opposed it so clearly and fully answered; we are enabled much better to understand Christianity in its great extent and glorious evidence; to clear up such difficulties, as would otherwise have been insuperable, and to defend it against all its adversaries.

By shewing what pure Christianity was at the beginning, we are able much more clearly to point out what it ought now to be. and what are the corruptions of it in later ages; and we have thereby the proper means, in our hands, of shewing which way a reformation might be effected. And, when and where Christianity is professed in its purity, by having the authentic and original records of it in its primitive glory and perfection, we can the better maintain the purity of it, and prevent future corruptions.

Some, indeed, have applied passages in the epistles to Christians of all ages, which were designed only for some Christians, and in some particular cases; but that is one of the abuses of Holy Scripture, against which we are here guarding mankind. What might be a proper rule, to persons indulged with miraculous powers, can be no rule to us who have no such powers. And yet even such passages are of service now-a-days; as they are a clear proof that, in the primitive church, there were such powers; and consequently the most glorious evidence attended Christianity, when it first made its appearance.
appearance in the world. Epistles, written to churches, where the apostles had many and bitter enemies; and which contain appeals to such churches, that such spiritual gifts and miraculous powers had been communicated by them, and did then subsist and abound; contain arguments of a peculiar kind in favour of the truth of the Christian religion. For, if there had been, among their converts, no such spiritual gifts and miraculous powers, their enemies would not have failed to have insulted them, and triumphed over them. And Christianity must, in a short time, have sunk, as a most notorious imposture. [See my Reasonableness of the Christian religion, &c. p. 128, &c.]

It has been already observed that the apostolic epistles were not circular letters, nor catholic epistles, originally written to all Christians; and equally suited to the cases and circumstances of all Christian churches, at all times and in all places. The general doctrines and precepts do, indeed, equally concern all Christians. And the apostolic epistles, which were written to particular churches, or persons, and exactly adapted to their case, are fairly applicable to the cases of all churches and of all Christians, as far as their cases are like those of the persons, or churches, to which they were originally addressed. —This is not confining their meaning; nor extending it, as I apprehend, beyond what the apostles designed; or beyond the intention of that sacred spirit, by which they were guided and directed, in all that they spoke or wrote, relating to the doctrine of the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The CONCLUSION.

To conclude: It appears to me that a critical interpreter of holy Scripture should set out with this, as a first principle; viz. "that no text of Scripture has more than one meaning." That one true sense he should endeavour to find out, as he would find out the sense of Homer, or any other ancient writer. When he has found out that sense, he ought to acquiesce in it. And so ought his readers too; unless, by the just rules of interpretation, they can shew that he has mistaken the passage; and that another is the one, just, true, and critical sense of the place.

END OF VOL. IV.