AN ATTEMPT
TO DISPLAY
THE ORIGINAL EVIDENCES
OF
CHRISTIANITY
IN
THEIR GENUINE SIMPLICITY.

By N. NISBETT, A. M.
RECTOR OF TUNSTALL.

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PREFACE.

If there be any merit in the following work, it is in a faithful and undeviating attention to the gospel history, as an history of the great controversy between our Lord and his countrymen, concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character; and though it is, perhaps, little more than an abridgment of a much larger work, published in the year 1802, yet the plan which I have adopted seems to me to bid fair to be a sure guide to the right understanding of the New Testament, and of some of its most obscure and difficult passages. Upon some of these passages I have been compelled to differ very materially from many very learned and very excellent men; but I have the heartfelt satisfaction of reflecting, that the opinion
opinion which I have adopted, is, at least, as favourable to the interests of Christianity as their’s, and is, as I humbly conceive, supported by superior arguments. It has also this additional advantage, that it harmonizes, most exactly, with the general tenor of the gospel history, and with the whole of the New Testament, the book of the Revelations excepted, which I do not profess to understand. I am not ashamed to make this acknowledgment; Luther, and Calvin, and Lardner, and many other great men, having done it before me. And whoever has read what Professor Michaelis and Dr. Less have advanced upon the subject of the authenticity of this book, will not be very confident that it ought to be ranked among the sacred books. At least I do not think myself justified in quoting from it, in matters of controversy.

The application of St. Paul’s Man of Sin, to the church of Rome, to which I chiefly allude, appears to me to be radically defective, upon this ground, that however corrupt
that church may be supposed to be, she cannot, with any propriety, be said to have apostatized from the Christian faith; for the divine mission of our Lord is as much an article of her creed as it is of ours; and the very corruptions of the church of Rome, of which we so justly complain, are supported by an appeal to the authority of scripture. The late bishop of St. Asaph (Dr. Horsley) speaking upon this subject, says, "It was a constructive apostacy never understood to be such by those to whom the guilt has been imputed." And Mr. Kett, speaking of the awful tragedies lately transacted in France, says, "The whole clergy (of France) were persecuted by those who publicly professed the same religious faith, and for no other crime than that of sacrificing their interest to their consciences. Yet more than two thirds of the parochial clergy at Paris remained firm, and the proportion in the country, where the number could not be so accurately ascertained, was calculated still higher. The prelates
themselves, gave an illustrious example; only
four out of one hundred and thirty-eight,
the whole number of the bench, became
what their brethren considered as apostates.”
See Mr. Kett's History the Interpreter of Pro-

The opinion which I have adopted, upon
the meaning of St. Paul's Man of Sin, is not
a novel one.—It has not been hastily formed;
it having arisen from the manner in which,
for more than twenty years, I have been ac-
custom ed to study the gospel history as an
history of the controversy concerning the
Messiah's character. And it has been espoused
by many very learned men, particularly by
the great Grotius, and by our own country-
man, Dr. Whitby. But of the justness of
this opinion, the reader will form his own
judgment from the arguments which have
been made use of. If they are solid and con-
vincing, it matters little, by whom it has
been espoused, or by whom opposed.

I should not think myself justified without
remarking,
remarking, that in the interpretation of Matthew, xvi. 27, I have differed from what I had supposed to be the meaning in my Triumphs of Christianity over Infidelity—but I am far from being confident that I may not be mistaken—but whichever may be the true sense, the meaning of the following verse will not be affected by it.

I cannot conclude without expressing my gratitude to the subscribers to this work, and particularly to the inhabitants of Sittingbourne and its vicinity; without whose patronage I could not have ventured again to appear before the public.

Tunstall,
Dec. 21, 1806.
ERRATA.

In page 81, line 10—for its read their.
In the Note, page 95, last line—for my Key read my Triumphs
of Christianity.
THE

ORIGINAL EVIDENCES

OF

CHRISTIANITY, &c.

The purity and excellence of the morality of the gospel, and its unquestionable tendency to promote the best interests of society, both civil and religious, has been universally acknowledged, and is, in fact, altogether without a rival in the history of mankind. Yet Christianity has not been exempt from being considered as an imposture. In our own times, which have justly been deemed more enlightened than any which have preceded them, perhaps from its infancy to the present moment, it hath been treated as such, not merely by the phrenzy of those who have been suddenly let loose from the wholesome restraints of law and government, but by the cool and deliberate judgment of men of the most enlarged and comprehensive minds—by men who have professed that they were divested of all prejudice against it, and impartial searchers after truth. And it is much to be apprehended, that even of those who do profess Christianity, there are but too many who have embraced
embraced it, not because they are convinced of its truth, but because it is the religion of the country in which they live; and because they believe some religion to be essential to the good order and happiness of society.

To judge of the truth or fallhood of Christianity, it is evidently necessary to understand the book in which it is contained. But if a judgment may be formed from the very different and opposite opinions which have been held concerning it, and from the unsuccessful labours of commentators upon it, this has been found to be no easy task. "The labours of expositors and commentators," says the learned Bishop Newton, very feelingly, "which were designed for a remedy," to remove the difficulties of Scripture, "are now become a part of the disease. The case is the same with the laws of God as with the laws of the land. Read a statute, and you will think you sufficiently understand it, but afterwards hear the opinions of counsel upon it, and their explanations, and they will explain the meaning quite away: in like manner, many a text

*a If a person in reading the New Testament does not understand it, he will very soon be induced to read it with indifference, if not with disgust. It is to be hoped that the neglect of the Scriptures, so justly complained of, arises more from this cause than from an irreligious principle. Let it be rendered perfectly intelligible as to its great end and design, and it must create a powerful interest in the breasts of all but the profligate and unprincipled, if they are at all capable of judging of the nature of evidence."
of scripture seemeth plain enough to a man upon his reading it by himself, and comparing it with the context; but upon consulting the tribe of paraphrasts and annotators, he scarce knoweth what to think, and instead of that one genuine sense which he conceived, he hath ten or twenty senses offered to him, or rather no sense at all. Commentators are a kind of necessary evils; there is no doing well without them or with them b.

It has likewise been very judiciously observed by the Bishop of Landaff, that "when men are desirous of forming systems, they are apt to collect together a number of texts, which being taken as abstract propositions, seem to establish the point; but which, when interpreted by the context, ap-


"I begin to think," says the author of Discursory Considerations on St. Luke's Preface, "that calmly, dispassionately, and patiently to read the scriptures, with an humble mind, a pure desire to benefit thereby, and a sincere wish to understand the great credenda and agenda therein contained, will make frequent reference to voluminous and highly learned commentators, in most instances, unnecessary; and will sometimes enable us readily to comprehend, and satisfactorily to elucidate, passages, concerning the supposed difficulty of which aequant commentators." P. 7.

It would, in my humble opinion, be a great imputation upon the Christian scriptures if it did not. Whatever success I have had in illustrating the scriptures, I certainly do owe much more to the scriptures themselves than to commentators.
pear to have no relation to it. There is no greater
source of error than this practice; it has prevailed
in the Christian church from the earliest ages, and
it still prevails. We owe to it the corruptions of
Popery, and that infinity of heresies which have so
much debased the simplicity of gospel truth, and
driven so many men of sense from embracing
Christianity. Every one who will well weigh the
subject, must perceive the unfairness with which
men usually proceed in forming systems in theo-
logy. By stringing together detached sentences,
an Ausonius may compel the chaste Virgil to fur-
nish materials for an indecent poem; and from the
Bible itself, a system of impiety might, by such
means, be extracted."

It is the principal object of this work to call
the reader's attention to the only legitimate me-
thod of doing justice to the sacred writings, and of
ascertaining with precision, their genuine meaning.
The Gospels are come down to us in the form of
histories, and it will presently appear, with an evi-
dence not to be resisted, that they are histories of
the controversy between our Lord and the Jews
concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character,
and whether he himself was the person who actually
did sustain that character. If our faith in Christ

* See Bishop's Watson's charge, delivered in 1795, p.
79.
be rational and consistent, it must rest upon this foundation, and upon this foundation only.

From not having considered the gospel history in this important point of view, one of the most formidable objections has been brought against the truth of Christianity, which is to be met with in the

* BESIDES the evidence arising from the Gospel histories themselves, of their being histories of the controversy concerning the nature of the Messiah's character and whether Jesus himself was the Messiah, the history of the Acts of the Apostles contains numerous instances of the fact. Acts ii. 36. God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified both Lord and Messiah. viii. 5. Then Philip went into a city of Samaria, and preached τον χριστόν, the Messiah to them. ix. 20. Paul preached in the Synagogues τον χριστόν, the Messiah. xvii. 3. This Jesus whom I preach unto you is ὁ χριστός, the Messiah. xvii. 5. Paul testified to the Jews that Jesus was τον χριστόν, the Messiah. v. 28. Shewing from the scriptures that Jesus was τον χριστόν, the Messiah.

In the Epistles, the capital article of a Christian's faith is, that Jesus was the Messiah. 1 John ii. 22. Who is a liar if not he who denieth that Jesus is ὁ χριστός, the Messiah. V. 1. Whosoever believeth that Jesus is ὁ χριστός, the Messiah, is born of God. And, V. 5. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God. Ephes. ii. 20. Christians are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, αὐτῶν Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ, Jesus the Messiah, being himself the chief corner stone. 1 Cor. iii. 2. Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, that Jesus is ὁ χριστός, the Messiah. 2 Peter i. 16. We have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known to you δύναμιν, the miraculous power and coming of our Lord Jesus τον χριστόν, the Messiah.

B 3 whole
whole of its annals. It has, in express terms, been asserted by the celebrated Mr. Gibbon, the very elegant and instructive historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, that "in the primitive church, the influence of truth was very powerfully strengthened by an opinion, which, however it may deserve respect from its usefulness and antiquity, has not been found to be agreeable to experience. It was," he says, "universally believed that the end of the world and the kingdom of heaven were at hand. The near approach of this wonderful event had been predicted by the Apostles; the tradition of it was preserved by their earliest disciples, and those who understood in their literal sense the discourses of Christ himself, were obliged to expect the second and glorious coming of the Son of Man in the clouds before that generation was totally extinguished which had beheld his humble condition upon earth, and which might still be witness to the calamities of the Jews under Vespasian or Hadrian. The revolution of seventeen centuries has instructed us not to press too closely the mysterious language of prophecy and revelation." Mr. Gibbon adds with a sneer, which cannot easily be mistaken: "But as long as, for wise purposes, this error was permitted to subsist in the church, it was productive of the most salutary effects on the faith and practice of Christians, who lived in the awful expectation of that moment when
when the globe itself, and all the various race of mankind, should tremble at the appearance of their divine judge:"

What renders this objection the more formidable is, that it really contains nothing more than is to be met with in the writings of Christians themselves, and of those too of the highest eminence and reputation for their knowledge of the sacred writings. The learned Dr. Edwards, who has been described as being possessed of a strong and elegant mind, has, from the pulpit of the University of Cambridge, with great fairness and impartiality stated their sentiments upon this subject. "It may not," he says, "be thought wonderful that Baronius and other Romanists, to avoid the application of the Man of Sin, should earnestly contend that the speedy appearance of Christ was expected by the Apostles; (see Mede's Works, p. 665); but it is somewhat remarkable, that the orthodox father of the celebrated prelate who translated Isaiah, in a treatise designed to confute a supposed latitudinarian, should assent to the validity of our historian's objection, by confessing, without reserve, that the Apostles were mistaken. (See Lowth's Vindication, &c. p. 52.) Grotius insinuates, that

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for wise purposes the pious deception was permitted to take place; (Gibbon, vol. ii. p. 301. See Grotius de Veritat. lib. ii. § 6. Cleric. ad 1 Thess. v. 10.) And an ingenious professor of our own university does not appear to be extremely solicitous to relieve the Apostles from the accusation of error. (See Dr. Watson's Apology, p. 61.) But how far these concessions may be founded on truth, can be discovered only by an examination of those passages which are usually brought forward in the discussion of this subject.

In this examination, Dr. Edwards himself appears to have been so far from being solicitous to relieve the Apostles from the accusation of error, that, at the close of it, he says, “I have now completed the examination of those passages which I intended to notice; others might be added equally clear and determinate; but these which I have selected seem abundantly sufficient to establish the justness of Mr. Locke’s opinion, (vide ad 2 Cor. v. 3.) that the Apostles expected, in their own time, the end of the world and the appearance of Christ. It becomes therefore,” he adds, “the antagonist of our historian, most earnestly to consider whether the real interests of Christianity would not be more essentially promoted by conceding the objection to

his adversary, than by vainly attempting to remove it. We need not be apprehensive that any injurious consequences will arise from the concession, for as our ingenious Professor very candidly acknowledges, (p. 64), the Apostles might surely be proper witnesses of the life and resurrection of Jesus, though they were ignorant of the precise time when he would come to judge the world.

A very learned writer, in a private correspondence, has thus expressed his sentiments upon the subject. "I cannot help thinking that the primitive Christians, and perhaps even the Apostles, did expect the day of judgment to be near at hand. I think that some of St. Paul’s expressions will hardly admit of any other interpretation." And, what is still more remarkable, the late Reverend Newcome Cappe, who certainly dedicated a large portion of a long life to the study of the sacred writings, has boldly asserted, that "St. Paul had no conception even of the existence of the church on earth, after the abolition of the

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**Query.**—Could Dr. Edwards be serious when he said this? To me it appears that such language is utterly inexcusable, and unworthy of the character of a man; for no one who possesses an atom of impartiality can entertain a doubt, that if the objection, as stated by Mr. Gibbon, be well founded, Christianity must be an imposture. Dr. Hammond, long ago observed, that Mahomet having promised, after his death, he would presently return to life again, and having not performed his promise in a thousand years, is by us justly considered as an impostor.

Mosaic
Mosaic economy," i.e. after the destruction of Jerusalem.

With respect to that part of Mr. Gibbon’s objection which concerns our Lord himself, it has been said with great confidence, and with as much appearance of coolness and unconcern, as if Christianity could not in the smallest degree be affected by it; “We find it very evident that our Lord is recorded by his historians, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, to have declared that his second coming was one of those events which would happen during the lives of his cotemporaries. We find ourselves obliged to make this concession, and let Mr. Gibbon make every advantage of it that he can.”

Such are the opinions and concessions of Christi-

1 See Mr. Cappe’s Critical Remarks on many important Passages of Scripture, Vol. I. p. 187. Mr. Cappe says, “This does not seem to be the case with Peter; there are no traces of any such conceptions in his writings, but rather of the contrary.” Ibid. Here it is obvious to remark, that St. Paul was not a whit behind the chief of the Apostles: and he expressly says, that, in conference, even Peter could add nothing to what he knew of the Christian revelation. See Gal. ii. 6. Besides, the fact is, that there are in the Epistles of St. Peter, full as strong traces of these conceptions, according to the generally received opinion, as in the Epistles of St. Paul.

k See the Theological Repository, Vol. VI. p. 162. This volume being the last of that publication, this concession, so far as appears, was not attempted to be refuted; and it is not, I think, unfair to presume that the conductor of that work was unequal to the task, otherwise he could not, or at least ought not, to have withheld it from public attention.
tian writers upon this subject; which, I may venture to affirm, never could have existed, if the gospel history had been considered as an history, and particularly as an history of the great controversy between our Lord and the Jews concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character. But it is an observation as true as it is old, that the assaults of infidels, and not unfrequently the mistakes and inconsiderate concessions of the friends of Christianity, have been highly favourable to its best interests, in causing it to be more closely examined, and more fully understood, than it otherwise would have been. And there is not, perhaps, in the whole compass of theological controversy, a single instance in which so much advantage will accrue to the Christian cause, as by a thorough investigation of the language of Scripture upon which this objection is founded; for it will necessarily lead to the establishment of the principal object of this work, the only legitimate method of studying the original records of Christianity.

Although we are not precisely informed upon what passages Mr. Gibbon has founded his objection, yet I think it must be evident that, when he says it was universally believed that the end of the world and the kingdom of heaven were at hand, and that those who understood, in their literal sense, the discourses of Christ himself, were obliged to expect the second and glorious coming of the Son of Man
in the clouds, before that generation was totally extinguished which had beheld his humble condition upon earth, he founded his assertion upon our Lord's primary declaration that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, and upon his subsequent assurances that they should not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man came—that there were some then living who should not taste of death till they saw the Son of Man coming in his kingdom, and that they should see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven.

As to our Lord’s primary declaration, that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, we find, upon looking into the gospel history, that it was a language which had previously been adopted by his forerunner, John the Baptist, who called the attention of his countrymen to its near approach, in these terms, Matt. iii. 2. Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And when our Lord himself entered upon his important office, he closely adhered to the same language, chap. iv. 17. From that time, i.e. as appears from the 12th verse, from the time that John was thrown into prison, began Jesus to preach, and to say, Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. When afterwards he commissioned his disciples to preach in his name, his instructions to them were, to say to his countrymen, chap. x. 7. As ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Their pub-
lic instructions are likewise styled, *Preaching the Kingdom of God.* Thus, Mark i. 14. Jesus is said to go into Galilee preaching the Kingdom of God. In Matt. ix. 35, it is said, Jesus went about all the cities and villages teaching in their synagogues, and preaching to Εὐαγγελία συναγωνία; the gospel; or rather, as it ought to have been rendered, the good news of the kingdom.

It would betray the grossest ignorance of the meaning of this language, to interpret it, of the future and everlasting kingdom, to be established at the end of the world; for though, in its design, it evidently has a reference to it, yet it as evidently has an immediate and direct reference to the near approach of the kingdom of the Messiah, foretold by the ancient prophets, and more particularly by the prophet Daniel, in his prophecy of the seventy weeks, then just expiring, and in his subsequent prediction, that the God of heaven would set up a kingdom that should never be destroyed.

The use of this language of John the Baptist, and of our Lord, as connected with the ancient prophecies upon the subject of the coming of the kingdom of the Messiah, appears, from the account of the evangelical historians, to have had a very sensible and powerful effect upon the Jewish nation;

1 From comparing these passages together, it appears evidently that the phrases, the kingdom of heaven, and the kingdom of God, are synonymous. St. Matthew chiefly uses the former expression, the other evangelists the latter. which
which they have not failed to point out, in such very strong terms, as to leave no room to doubt in what sense they understood it; for, when John first adopted it, St. Matthew says, chap. iii. 5, that Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, went out to meet him, and were baptized by him in Jordan, confessing their sins. And St. Luke states, in terms the most explicit and decisive, the reason of their thus flocking to him, in so general a manner, in consequence of the use of this language; for he says, chap. iii. 15, that as the people were in expectation of the appearance of the Messiah, all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he was O \( \chi \) \( \psi \)-\( \rho \) the Christ, or the Messiah, or not. In like manner, when our Lord went about all Galilee preaching the good news of the kingdom, the historian says, that there followed him great multitudes of people; from Galilee, from Decapolis, from Jerusalem, from Judea, and from beyond Jordan; evidently, from the same expectation, (as they were disappointed in John the Baptist) that he might be the Messiah.

This general expectation of the Messiah, at the time of our Lord's appearance, is so well authenticated by the gospel historians, that all descriptions of Christian writers entertain, precisely, the same opinion upon the subject.

Dr. Sykes has observed, that "the Jews were so well acquainted with this language, and were so well apprized of a kingdom which God had re-
solved to set up, that as often as Jesus talked of
the kingdom of heaven, or of God, neither the people
nor their rulers ever offered to ask him the mean-
ing of that phrase, which yet we cannot suppose
them not to have done, if he had talked with and
to them in a language they were unacquainted
with."m

Bishop Chandler says, "The expectation of the
Messiah, intimated in the use of this language, was
not the opinion of a few devout people only, who
are said to wait for the consolation of Israel at the
time of our Saviour's birth; or of the meaner fort,
who thought the kingdom of God (a phrase for the
kingdom of the Messiah) should immediately ap-
pear; but it was the settled judgment of the chief
priests, and the learned in their law. They who
made the study of the scriptures their chief busines,
were unanimous in this belief; the expectation was
national."n

Dr. White, the very learned Bamptonian lec-
turer, speaking upon this subject, says, "It is very
evident, from several passages in the New Testa-
ment, that the Jews were in expectation of the
Messiah at the time of Christ's appearance. The

m See Dr. Sykes on the Christian Religion, p. 29.

n See Bishop Chandler's Defence of Christianity, vol. i.
p. 5. The Bishop adds, that "whenever they saw or heard
of any quality, great or extraordinary in its kind, they turned
their eyes that way, hoping that the possessor of those quali-
ties might be the man they looked for."
woman of Samaria, though of a schismatical church, yet deriving her knowledge from the same sources of divine prophecy, said to Jesus, I know that Messiah cometh, &c. John iv. 25. In Luke iii. 5. we are informed that the preaching of John was of so divine a nature, that all men mused in their hearts whether he was the Christ, or not. The message of the Jews by the priests and Levites to John, Art thou the Christ? is a sufficient proof of the expectation which generally prevailed of the advent of a divine person sustaining this character. John i. 9. The coming of the Messiah made an express article of the Jewish faith, as we are informed by Maimonides, and others of that church; and the denial of it was deemed a dangerous heresy, and a virtual renunciation of the authority of the law of Moses.

From these accounts it appears, I think, with an evidence bordering upon demonstration, that the synonymous phrases, the kingdom of heaven, and the kingdom of God, mentioned in the beginning of the gospel history, relate exclusively to the kingdom of the Messiah; and that his declaration that it was at hand, appears as clearly to mean, that the Messiah's kingdom was then about to be established.

It appears, however, from the same history, that the Jews in general, and our Lord's own disciples in particular, held very erroneous notions concerning the nature of the Messiah's character, viewing him as a temporal prince, who was to rescue them from the yoke of the Romans, to whom they were then subject,
ject, and to raise them, as a nation, to the dis-
tinguished pre-eminence of being the lords of the
world.

This fact, likewise, is so well stated, from the
Christian records, by the learned, that no apology
will be necessary for presenting their sentiments
upon it. "In the person of the Messiah," says
Dr. White, "they beheld a mighty and glorious
king, who should appear with all the pomp of
temporal greatness, and all the terrors of earthly
power, trampling upon the enemies and oppressors
of Israel, and leading forth his people amidst the
triumphs of conquest and the splendour of domi-
nion. The manifest expiration of the time pre-
scribed by the prophets, the departure of the sceptre
from Judah, and the subjection of their country
to the Roman power, were circumstances which,
at this time, added new strength to the opinion
which had thus been endeared to them by early
prejudice, and sanctified by authoritative tradition.
Every heart was now warmed with hope, and
every eye looked forward with anxious expectation
to the moment when the glory of Zion should
appear, and Judea be for ever exalted above the
kingdoms of the earth; when they should behold
suppliant nations crouding into the sanctuary, and
Rome herself, the haughty mistress of the world,
bowing prostrate at the feet of Jerusalem.

"Nor were these glorious expectations confined
to the chief rulers of the Jews, whose superior
C
stations seeming to entitle them to the first honours and emoluments of the Messiah's kingdom, might have induced them the more readily to embrace, and the more industriously to disseminate an opinion which promised so complete a gratification to their ambition. Even the disciples of our Lord, who had been, in general, selected from the lowest and the meanest of the people, long retained the same delusive opinion, and indulged the same fallacious hopes with the rest of their countrymen.

"Nay, so firmly was this belief impressed upon their minds, that not all the frequent and solemn declarations of their master to the contrary, were able to efface it entirely from their minds. Nor, indeed, do they seem to have been effectually roused from the pleasing dream of temporal grandeur which had captivated their imaginations, till his death had tried the constancy of their faith, till his resurrection had revived their drooping spirits, and his ascension into heaven had rectified their errors and invigorated their resolution.

"From this mistaken opinion arose the frequent struggles for superiority among them, which they have so ingenuously recorded. Hence the petition of the mother of Zebedee's children. Hence, too, the impatient and misguided zeal of Peter, who, when Christ pathetically related his approaching humiliation, his sufferings and his death, took him and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee.

"To
"To this may be added the words of one of the disciples, with whom our Lord, in his way to Emmaus, conversed after his resurrection. We trusted that it had been he who should have redeemed Israel. This reflection arose from the same prejudice that had long flattered the national vanity, and expressed the most painful sense of disappointment."

To the same purpose, the learned Dr. Lardner having observed that the expectation of the Messiah, about the time of the appearance of Jesus, was universal, and had been so for some while, adds, that "with the idea of a prophet, or extraordinary teacher of religion, they had also joined that of a worldly king and conqueror, who should deliver the Jewish people from the burdens under which they laboured, raise them to a state of independence, and bring the nations of the earth into subjection to them, to be ruled and tyrannized over by them. And because our Lord did not perform nor attempt this, they rejected and crucified him. If he would but have assumed the state and character of an earthly prince, scribes and pharisees, priests and people, would all have joined themselves to him, and have put themselves under his banner. Of this we see many proofs in the gospels. This disposition prevailed to the last."

To these testimonies I must beg leave to add

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See Dr. White's Bampton Lectures, p. 114 to 118.

See Lardner's Ancient Jewish and Heathen Testimonies, vol. i. p. 69. 4to.
that of the late Dr. Paley, who was second to no man in the knowledge of the sacred writings. "The Jewish people," says he, "with, or without reason, had worked themselves into a persuasion that some signal and greatly advantageous change was to be effected in the condition of their country, by the agency of a long-promised messenger from heaven. The rulers of the Jews, their leading sect, their priesthood, had been the authors of this persuasion to the common people. So that it was not merely the conjecture of theoretical divines, or the secret expectation of a few recluse devotees; but it was become the popular hope and passion, and, like all other popular opinions, undoubting and impatient of contradiction. They clung to this hope under every misfortune of their country, and with more tenacity as their dangers or calamities increased."  


I hope I shall be excused if I add what Mr. Maltby has said upon the subject, "The Jews," he says, "were in almost daily expectation of a chosen prophet from heaven, who should be armed with power to deliver them from their enemies, assert the superiority as well as permanence of the Mosaic institutions, and extend over all the world the empire of the sons of Abraham. These opinions and expectations, it must be remembered, were rivetted with the greater force, and indulged with the less scruple, as they conceived them to be founded upon the will of the Almighty; and consequently that their opinions could not be wrong, nor their expectations frustrated.
It must afford peculiar satisfaction to the inquirer after truth, that the general expectation of a person who should obtain—or who should endeavour to obtain universal rule, does not altogether rest upon the evidence of the sacred writings.

The celebrated Josephus, who was himself a Jew and a distinguished general, in the early part of the Jewish war which terminated in the total destruction of Jerusalem, and consequently was perfectly well acquainted with the sentiments of his countrymen, expressly says, that "that which chiefly excited the Jews to the war was an ambiguous prophecy, which was also found in their sacred books that, at that time, some one within their country should arise that should obtain the empire of the world." Tacitus likewise, the Roman annalist, mentions the same persuasion as having existed at that period, and particularly, that it was found in the ancient books of the priests. And, he adds that, "this prediction had taken such full possession of the common people among the Jews, that they were not compelled to frustrated. Nor were these the casual sentiments of the vulgar and unthinking, or the laboured interpretations of the studious only; but they were the collective and unanimous sentiments of the whole body of the people; insomuch that there probably were but few sufficiently enlightened, and sufficiently unprejudiced, not to participate in them." See Maltby's Illustrations, p. 81.
resign their dependence upon this prophecy, but by a series of calamities.” And most remarkable to the same purpose, are the words of Suetonius. A constant opinion prevailed throughout the east that it was predicted by the fates that, at that time, the Jews would become the lords of all.

The testimony of writers of such high respectability in the ancient world, cannot but be esteemed of considerable importance in establishing the evidence of the facts related in the gospel history. And that these facts should be confirmed by a writer who denies that there is any evidence worth noticing of the very existence of the author

That in the Augustan age there flourished in Judea an extraordinary person called Jesus Christ, is a fact better supported, says an able writer, than that there lived such men as Cyrus, Alexander, and Julius Cæsar. For there are more historical monuments to attest his existence and character, and infinitely more numerous and incontestable vestiges in the present day to prove that there was such a person as Christ, than that there ever lived in past ages such potent monarchs and illustrious conquerors. As certainly as Christianity is now existing in the world, so certainly did its founder and publisher sometime exist. The public monuments, which the renowned heroes of antiquity left behind, are long since perished: the magnificent palaces they built, the superb structures they reared, the grand temples and mausoleums they erected, the opulent cities they founded, are now now no more. Few remaining visible traces are left of the battles they fought, the empires they established, the systems of laws they compiled, and the universal devastation they once spread around
thor of our religion, is not a little remarkable—
but such is the fact. Mr. Volney himself, the

daring

around them: the kingdoms they once conquered, have, by
the instability of human condition, undergone many revo-
lutions, have repeatedly lost, and repeatedly gained their
liberty, and experienced all those reverses to which terres-
trial glory is subjected. The curious traveller explores large
regions in search of standing records of the greatness of for-
mer princes, travertes immense countries, once the seat of
science and liberty, now the abode of barbarism and slavery;
once swarming with inhabitants, and variegated with unnum-
bered towns and villages, now a dreary inhospitable solitude;
and even searches, but in vain, for cities and temples and
palaces in the very situation where they once stood. Baby-
lon is now fallen!—Persepolis and Ecbatana are now no
more!—and travellers have long disputed, but not been able
to ascertain, the site of ancient Nineveh, that exceeding
great city, of three days journey. Few are the present signa-
tures, in minor Asia and India, of Alexander's victorious arms;
few are the standing memorials in Gaul and Britain to evince
that there was such a person as Julius Caesar, who subdued
the one, and invaded the other. But that there was such a
person as Jesus Christ, who lived, died, and rose again, and
founded a spiritual empire of religion, the present state of
all the republics and kingdoms in Europe demonstrates. The
customs and usages, that obtain in every nation, necessarily
imply a cause and a reason, to which they owe their origin,
and suppose a date, from which they commenced. Reli-
gious institutions universally regarded, religious solemnities
universally celebrated, lead the inquiring mind through past
ages to the period at which they began, to the person or per-
sons who established them, and to the sources from which
they flowed. All national usages are public monuments of
daring and intrepid Mr. Volney, is compelled, by
the force of truth, to own the general expectation
of a temporal deliverer to come.

"From

facts, and are standing proofs, through all successive times,
that the persons, whose memory they thus embalm, and the
events, whose importance they thus record, once actually
existed. We see great numbers of vast and populous king-
doms around us, all unanimously agreed in baptizing their
offspring in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;
in commemorating the author and finisher of our faith by
the memorials of bread and wine; in worshipping the Deity
through a Mediator; in appropriating the first day of the
week to religious worship; and in solemnizing the nativity,
death, resurrection, and ascension of the author of our
religion. How shall we account for institutions and usages
universally received in Europe, and universally practised by
all the various churches, sects, and denominations, every
where existing? They were not instituted in the present
age—they did not commence in the times of our immediate
ancestors. We find we can follow the sacred stream even
beyond its source into ages, when no such customs prevailed,
when there was no such religion as Christianity, and when
Pagan idolatry and Judaism universally reigned. As certainly,
therefore, as the present state of the Jews, their tenets, their
ceremonious observances, their peculiar customs, their disper-
sion into all the nations of the world, yet remaining a distinct
separate body through all the infinite changes and revolutions
that affect kingdoms and communities, is an incontestible
proof, that there was such a legislator as Moses; so certain
is the conclusion from the stated solemn rites, that now uni-
versally obtain among all Christian countries, that there once
flourished such a law-giver as Jesus Christ, who founded that
religion
"From the time," he says, "that the Assyrians had destroyed the kingdom of Samaria, some sagacious spirits foresaw, announced, and predicted, the same fate to Jerusalem; and all their predictions were stamped by this particularity, that they always concluded with prayers for a happy re-establishment and regeneration, which were, in like manner, spoken of, in the way of prophecies. The enthusiasm of the Hierophants had figured a royal deliverer, who was to re-establish the nation in its ancient glory. The Hebrews were again to become a powerful and conquering people, and Jerusalem, the capital of an empire that was to extend over the whole world. Events having realized the first part of those predictions, the ruin of Jerusalem, the people clung to the second with a firmness of belief proportioned to their misfortunes, and the afflicted Jews waited with the impatience of want and desire for that victorious king and deliverer that was to come, in order to save the nation of Moses and restore the throne to David." See Volney's Ruins, 3d edition, p. 285-6.

Such are the various and accumulated evidences of the truth of these facts, in so full a manner attested by almost every page of the gospel history, that, I think, they may justly be considered as indif-

religion so many nations have espoused, and who instituted those solemnities and customs we see universally observed by all who profess his gospel. Harwood's Introduction, p. 1—6.
putable. And it is particularly deserving of notice, that these facts have for their vouchers, *all modern Jews*, for they entertain precisely the same sentiments, and as Christians term them, the same prejudices concerning them, with their remote ancestors, and, consequently, they are so far living witnesses that they are facts which are built upon such a solid foundation of genuine historical evidence; which is the best evidence, next to that of sight, which can be offered to the human mind; leaving no justifiable room for doubt or unbelief.

From these premises, thus amply authenticated, it will, I think, naturally and necessarily follow, not only that our Lord's original declaration, that *the kingdom of heaven was at hand*, related to the near approach of the Messiah's kingdom, and, consequently, that Mr. Gibbon was mistaken when he supposed it related to his second coming in the generation in which he lived—but that *the gospel history*, if it be genuine, must be an history of the great controversy between our Lord and the Jews concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character. As such, I am fully persuaded it was intended to be considered, as affording a rational foundation for our belief in him as the true Messiah. By viewing it in this light, it will, if I mistake not, be found to exhibit *internal characters* of truth, equal to that of any other history, whether in ancient or modern times, and it will afford evidence sufficient to ascertain the precise meaning of the whole
whole of our Lord's subsequent language, from which Mr. Gibbon has been induced to suppose that he predicted *his second coming* in the generation in which he lived, to judge all mankind; sufficient, in a word, to prove to the satisfaction of every unprejudiced and impartial inquirer, that the language which he adopted, naturally arose from the nature of his claim to *the character of the Messiah*, and from his controversy with his countrymen concerning it.

By viewing the gospel history in this light, it must, I think, appear extremely obvious, that having none of those proofs to offer, of his sustaining *the character of the Messiah*, which the Jews, one and all, the disciples of Jesus themselves not excepted, invariably affixed to it, viz. that of his being *a temporal prince*, it was not in our Lord's power, on his first entrance on his public ministry, to avow himself as *the Messiah*, or to say that, *as such*, he was *already come*, not even to his own Disciples, without effectually defeating the great and important purposes of his mission and exposing himself to inevitable destruction.

The only conduct which the nature and circumstances of his situation permitted him to pursue was, to keep up their expectations of his declaring, at a proper time, that he was *the Messiah*; by working such miracles as, in their own nature, were calculated to make a strong impression upon their minds that he was, at least, *an extraordinary personage*;
personage; by giving them such instructions as had a tendency gradually to correct their prejudices concerning the nature of the Messiah's character; and by unfolding to them such events, as they were able to bear them, as were incompatible with their ideas of the nature of the Messiah's character; those, particularly, which related to his own sufferings and death, and to the fate which awaited them as a nation.

If the gospel history be examined with attention, our Lord's first object appears to have been to convince his countrymen that he was, at least, an extraordinary personage, by working of the most astonishing and stupendous miracles, such as no man had ever before done. St. Matthew informs us, ch. iv. 23, 24, in the closest connection with his declaration, that Jesus went about all Galilee teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the good news of the kingdom, i.e. of the kingdom of the Messiah; that he healed all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people; that his fame went throughout all Syria; and that they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils or demons, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy, and that he healed them. So, in chap. ix. after a relation of a great variety of astonishing miracles, the historian concludes the narration, by a general observation, what was his usual manner; ver. 35, And Jesus went
went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the good news of the kingdom of the Messiah, and healing every sickness and every kind of disease among the people. In a word, whoever pays the smallest attention to the gospel history, as such, will see blended with our Lord's instructions, a profusion of miracles of the most astonishing nature, in so much that the spectators asked, When O χριστός the Christ, or the Messiah, cometh—will he do more miracles than this man doth? See John vii. 31.

But the propriety of considering the gospel history as an history of the controversy between our Lord and the Jews, concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character, will still more distinctly appear, if we attend to his instructions, which were intended gradually to correct their prejudices concerning it. Our Lord's sermon upon the Mount, and, more particularly, the beatitudes with which it commences, is a remarkable specimen of this kind, and will be well deserving of particular attention; more especially as there are some parts of it, the beauty and singular propriety of which, seem, in a great measure, to have escaped the notice of the Christian world.

As the prejudices which it was our Lord's object to correct were common to the whole Jewish nation, his Disciples themselves not excepted, it is natural to suppose that it would have been addressed to the multitude at large, and not exclusively, as some
some have imagined, to the Apostles. The evangelical historian, St. Matthew, has been very particular in stating this to have been the fact; for, at the close of the chapter immediately preceding the sermon upon the Mount, after having observed that Jesus went about Galilee, preaching the good news of the kingdom, i.e., of the kingdom of the Messiah, he says, ch. iv. 25, there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, from Decapolis, from Jerusalem, from Judea, and from beyond Jordan. And, in the beginning of the fifth chapter, the historian says, that seeing the multitudes which flocked to him from these different places, he went up upon a mountain, and addressed this sermon to them. It is true indeed, the historian adds, that when Jesus was seated, his disciples came to him; but, not to lay any stress upon the common observation, that the term Disciples is often in the New Testament used in a very enlarged sense, this only proves, what will not be controverted, that the Disciples made a part of his audience. But this matter appears to be put out of all reasonable doubt, by the historian’s remark, at the close of the sermon; for he says, ch. viii. 1, that when he was come down from the mountain great multitudes followed him.

It being then clear, from this representation of the evangelist, that the sermon upon the mount was addressed to the people at large and not exclusively
fifty to the Disciples, it will, upon examination, appear equally clear, that it was our Lord’s first object, in this sermon, to correct the erroneous opinions of his hearers concerning the true nature of the Messiah’s kingdom. This I think will be abundantly evident, from the following short paraphrase of the Beatitudes.

The Jews, in consequence of their expectation that their Messiah would be a temporal prince, to lead them to conquest and to empire, naturally enough entertained the fond imagination of enjoying high distinction and possessing places of great trust and importance under his reign. But our Lord, who was thoroughly acquainted with the human heart, instead of directly attacking their prejudices, upon this head, by saying that such an ambitious turn of mind was contrary to the character which became the subjects of the Messiah’s kingdom, wisely contented himself with simply describing the disposition which would qualify them for becoming such; ver. 3, Blessed—or happy, are they who are poor in spirit—or who are unambitious and humble minded; for their’s is the kingdom of heaven.

With the possession of universal dominion under their Messiah, the Jews, it is probable, connected great worldly pleasures and enjoyments of every kind, and the most unbounded national prosperity. But our Lord, knowing their extreme depravity as a nation, and foreseeing the awful calamities which were
were about to happen to their country, taught
them that a state of sorrow and humiliation was
better suited to the circumstances of the times, and
more agreeable to his original declaration, that
repentance was a preparation absolutely necessary in
persons of their description, if they really wished
to enjoy the benefits of the Messiah's kingdom, so
anxiously expected by them. Verse 4. Blessed are
they that mourn; for they shall be comforted. In the
midst of the calamities which are coming upon the
Jews as a nation, they shall have their peculiar
consolations, arising from the enjoyment of the
inestimable blessings of the Messiah's kingdom; while
those who have in view no higher objects than
worldly pleasures under his reign, shall not only
have their expectations completely frustrated, but
be involved in the general ruin which is approach-
ing.

The Jews considered a warlike spirit in their
nation as essential to the promotion of their ambi-
tious views, with respect to the conquests which,
under the banners of their Messiah, they expected
to make, in order to their becoming the Lords of
the world. But to this our Lord opposed a spirit
which, both in its principle and in its effects, was
totally different. Blessed are the meek; for they shall
inherit the earth. This meekness of temper, and
patience under injuries and provocations, will en-
able them to weather many a storm which would
bear down the haughty and obstinate, and render
them
them capable of the full enjoyment of the blessings which this world affords.

The Jews were thirsting for exemption from the servitude which they were then under to the Romans, and still more to conquer and subdue them; and their ambition was not to be satiated but by their obtaining, under the reign of their Messiah, an universal empire over the whole world. But our Lord endeavoured to turn their attention to a far different and more noble object for the exercise of their ambition. **Blessed are they who hunger and thirst, not after riches and honours, but after righteousness; after the possession of the amiable, moral, and religious qualities of the heart, and the solid virtues of integrity and uprightness.** Such an ardent pursuit will yield them more solid and durable satisfaction, than the most extensive acquisitions of a mere worldly nature: and at the same time they shall have such a sufficiency of the enjoyments of this life, as shall answer all the purposes of real happiness, so far as it is attainable in this world. In a subsequent part of this sermon, this Beatitude seems to be more fully explained, chap. vi. 33. **Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,** i. e. the righteousness which it is the great object of the Messiah in his spiritual reign to establish upon earth; and all these things, viz. food and raiment, and all that is necessary to the comfortable enjoyment of life, shall be added unto you: for, adds...
our Lord, your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

The Jews confined their charity and compassion within the sphere of their own nation; and had no dealings, even with Samaritans, though more nearly allied to them, both in civil and religious sentiments, than any other people. But, in opposition to this narrow and contracted disposition, this unsocial selfishness, which is productive of so much mischief among mankind, our Lord says, Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. St. Luke's manner of expression appears to be an admirable comment upon this passage. Chap. vi. 36. Be ye therefore merciful as your Father also is merciful; i.e. Let your mercy be as extensive in its principle, and as far as possible in its effects, as that of the great Parent of the universe, which is not confined as that of the Jews was, to this or the other nation; but folds within its embraces the whole human race, and is kind even to the evil and unthankful. By thus imitating the benevolence of their heavenly Father, they would have just ground of confidence of obtaining that mercy from him, which as men, and particularly as sinful men, they stood so much in need of.

Dr. Dodderidge's paraphrase of this verse is as follows: "Far from training you up to delight in scenes of desolation and slaughter, I rather declare, Happy are the merciful and compassionate,
Among the evils which are usually connected with the pursuits of war and conquest, is the unlawful indulgence in the gratification of the passions with the unhappy females who are taken captive. Mr. Blair supposes, that when our Lord pronounced this beatitude, Blessed are the pure in heart, it might refer to the expectation the Jews had of possessing themselves of beautiful captives in those wars, by which they fancied that the Messiah's kingdom would be raised and established. However this may be, Dr. Doddridge's paraphrase of it seems sufficiently just.——“Indulge not a thought of those licentious gratifications, which are often mingled with victory, and are accounted as the pleasures of the great. Happy are the men that not only abstain from these gross enormities, but are concerned that they may be pure in heart too, avoiding every irregular desire, and mortifying every unruly passion. This resolute self-denial shall be the source of nobler and more lasting pleasure; for they shall see God, and, thus purified and refined, shall be fit subjects of the Messiah's kingdom, which forbids all impurity.”

The sentiments of the Jews concerning the nature of the Messiah's kingdom, naturally led them to compassionate, that feel the sorrows of others as their own, and with tender sympathy hasten to relieve them; for they shall obtain that mercy from God, which the best and happiest of mankind need, and on which they continually and entirely depend.”

cherish
cherish dispositions unfriendly to peace; but to check, and, if possible, to root out propensities so extremely inimical to human happiness, and even to the quiet and security of mankind, our Lord says, Blessed, or happy, are the peace-makers; for they shall be called, or accounted, as the children of God; for he is the God of peace. By cultivating this peaceful, this friendly disposition, they would be eminently qualified for becoming the subjects of the Messiahs kingdom, as a kingdom of righteousness and peace, of peace and good-will to men.

A state of suffering, though not entirely incompatible with the ideas which the Jews had formed of those glorious times which they were then expecting, was not what they imagined would take place, at least to any considerable degree. If, however, opposition should arise, they fully expected that, under the conduct of their Messiah, it would soon subside, and terminate in the completion of their most sanguine hopes. But the doctrine of our Lord upon this subject taught them what, by referring to the history of their ancestors, they might previously have known, that a state of suffering was, at no period of their history, a mark of the divine displeasure; that, as formerly, persecution and violence from wicked and unreasonable men were the lot of good men, so they must not now expect exemption from them. Blessed, or happy, are they who are persecuted for righteousness sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven; they shall possess
possess the blessings and privileges of the Messiah's reign; while the children of the kingdom, those who are expecting a worldly kingdom, and will listen to no one who does not make this a part of his mission, shall be cast out. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

The reader will form his own judgment how far I have, in the above paraphrase, expressed the spirit of these beatitudes; but it is of importance to observe, that they are evidently levelled against the prejudices of the Jews concerning the nature of the Messiah's kingdom, and were delivered with an express view of correcting them. And, so far, they possess very strong internal characters of the truth of the history.

In the following verses our Lord proceeds, with an admirable unity of design, to awaken the attention of his hearers to the great importance of their situation as Jews, and the supereminent advantages which they enjoyed for the promotion of the knowledge of what he had been teaching them concern-

The propensity which mankind have ever had to wars and conquest, to promote the purposes of an inordinate ambition, must render these beatitudes highly valuable in a general view. When war is engaged in for self-defence, which is the only legitimate cause of it, they are admirably calculated to control the licentiousness and cruelty which are but too apt to contami-
ing the nature of the Messiah's kingdom, and the dangerous consequences to themselves, as a nation, of their not making a right use of those advantages.

V. 13. Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt hath lost its savour, or its saltiness, wherewith it shall be salted; or rather, as I think the original should have been translated, by what means shall it recover its saltiness? εν τινι ἀληθησται? It is from thenceforth become useless; and fit only to be trodden under foot; i.e. as the words seem fairly to imply, when considered in their connection with the preceding and subsequent context, and more particularly with the 19th and 20th verses of this chapter; Ye Jews, in the present state of the world, are yet, as you have by the favour of Providence hitherto been, from the earliest period of your history, the salt of the earth, the only depositaries for the preservation of the knowledge of God among the nations of the earth". But if the salt hath lost its saltiness,

"The situation of the Jewish nation with respect to the nations which surrounded them, gives a peculiar propriety and beauty to this metaphor and the succeeding one, as applied to them. And it is well delineated by the learned Dr. John Leland.—“It pleased God, he observes, in his great wisdom and goodness towards mankind, to make discoveries of his will, not merely to a few particular persons, but to a whole nation, set apart as a preservative against the spreading idolatry which was in danger of becoming universal. By an extraordinary interposition, a constitution of a peculiar kind was established; the fundamental principle of which was, the acknowledgment and adoration of the one living and true God, and of him only. The people amongst whom this constitution and polity
nefs, or is become insipid; if by your traditions, afterwards in this very sermon particularly speci-

cality were erected, were not placed in a remote obscure cor-
ner of the earth; but in such a situation as was admirably
fitted for diffusing the knowledge of their religion and laws.
They were placed in the centre of the then known world, be-
tween Egypt and Arabia on the one hand, and Syria, Chaldea,
and Assyria, on the other; among whom the first great king-
doms were erected, and from whence knowledge and learning
seem to have been derived to the western nations. And that
this was really part of the design which the Divine Wisdöm
had in view in his dispensations towards the people of Israel,
appeareth from several passages of scripture.”

Dr. Ellis, in his very interesting book on the knowledge
of divine things from revelation, not from reason and nature,
says, “What not a little contributed to the preservation of
knowledge in the east, was God’s continuing to reveal himself
to the Jews; so that, in process of time, the little spot of
Jewry was the only place where the true God was known and
taught. And some beams of this divine wisdom could not but
shine forth from time to time upon the neighbouring people
who conversed with them. Accordingly, whenever we find a
people begin to revive in literature, it was owing to one of
these causes; either to some transmigrators from those parts
coming and settling among them, or else to their going thither
for instruction. From these fountains they always had it, and
at this fire the nations of the world lighted their own. There
is no instance given to the contrary. Hither Athens, and
afterwards Rome, came in quest of knowledge and instruction.
These were the schools and masters of the world. And though
our accounts of Asia are but short and defective, yet what
remains there are, as also their traditions, even in China,
trace their original and oracles westward.” The Jews were
then, in fact, clarissima mundi lumina, the lights of the world.
fied, you have made void the laws of God, and so corrupted them as to render them of no effect, you will cease to answer the purposes of salt for preservation, and being become insipid, or of no use, you will be thrown away and trodden under foot.

In the following verse our Lord changes the metaphor, but still expresses the same sentiment, under the sublimest and most beautiful of images. V. 14. Ye are the light of the world; a city which is set, or built, upon an hill cannot be hid; i.e. your situation for communicating light to the world around you is eminently conspicuous; as much so as a city which is built upon a hill and cannot be concealed.

These verses, it is true, have by the generality of commentators been applied to the Disciples of our Lord, as ministers of the gospel, and they, without doubt, were in the councils of heaven, intended to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. But I have, I think, already proved that this sermon was not delivered to his Disciples exclusively, but to the multitude at large. Besides, it appears unquestionable that, at the period when our Lord delivered this sermon upon the mount, these expressions could not, with any propriety, have been applicable to them, any more than to the rest of their countrymen. As Dr. Campbell has very justly observed, "the Apostles were not yet qualified for teaching the system of doctrine implied..."
plied under the name gospel; because, in fact, they
did not know it themselves. They had then no
notion of a Messiah but as a temporal prince and
mighty conqueror; or of his kingdom but as a se-
cular monarchy, more extensive than, but of the
same nature with, those which had preceded; to
wit, the Assyrian, the Persian, the Macedonian
empires, or that which was in being at the time,
the Roman. Not one of his hearers could have
been more prejudiced than the Apostles themselves
were, at that time, against a suffering Saviour, who
was to expire in agonies upon the cross. The
gospel is, manifestly what the Apostles were not
qualified to teach till they were enlightened by the
descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost,
after our Lord's ascension.

These

* Mr. Maltby, speaking of the commission which the Dis-
ciples were invested with, says, "it is obvious to remark the
limited nature of their preaching, during their master's life-
time. It was simply and expressly, to inculcate the neces-
sity of repentance, because the kingdom of heaven was at hand.
What this kingdom was, they had not yet learned: their
thoughts indeed were often directed to the subject, but their
ideas concerning its nature were grossly inaccurate. Their
whole conduct, both before and after the conferring of
these extraordinary powers, shews that they acted in obe-
dience to their master's command, in delivering to others
what he had enjoined; but that they were utterly unac-
quainted with the precise meaning of their message. It suf-
ficiently answered the purpose, for which they were sent,
These remarks of Dr. Campbell are so manifestly founded in truth, that not to admit them, would be to contradict the whole tenor of the gospel history. Indeed, this very sermon upon the mount, contains, of itself, very sufficient evidence that the Apostles were not particularly and exclusively meant by the salt of the earth and the light of the world; for our Lord, almost immediately afterwards, addresses these very persons, as imagining that to promote their ambitious views, the eternal laws of morality might be dispensed with.

that they should exhort their countrymen to amend their lives; that they should instruct them to expect the approach of the Prophet, from whom their own powers were derived, and from whom their hearers would receive fuller information as to the object of his mission and the nature of his doctrines. In conformity with these sentiments, is the opinion of the learned Rosenmüller. Nihil nunc quidem ultra mandatum apostolis, quam ut Judaos ad vitam melioram hortarentur, et ad Messiam audiendum pertraherent, quà accepturii essent cætera, quà ad salutem ipsius essent necessaria. Jesum esse hunc Messiam, nondum tunc palam temporis professi sunt discipuli. To the same effect the pious and judicious Le Clerc expresseth himself. Observandum est hoc loco Apostolos qui mittebantur ut nuntiarent propinquum esse regnum coelorum, vix ipsos satis scivisse quid esset; cum ad ascensum ipsum Christi, eum in terris regnaturumuisse crediderint. Vid. Akt. i. 6. Nihil ergo reponere potuissent quæreribus quid iis verbis intelligerent, nisi se à magistro suo, Jesu Nazareno, ita jussos loqui; cui rei addere poterant fidelem narrationem, ex quâ quid consequeretur, elicere auditores poterant. See Maltby's Illustrations, p. 169, 170. And Rosenmüller and Cleric. Ad Matth. x. 7.
Ver. 7, Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the Prophets: I am not come to destroy either, but to fulfil both; to give perfection to the one and to accomplish what the others have written of me: for, adds he, with a peculiar emphasis and energy, Verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one iota, or one tittle, shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled. He therefore immediately adds, Ver. 19, Whosoever shall break one of these commandments (of the moral law) and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven—but whosoever shall do and teach them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. And, with a view to the lax morality and the vicious conduct of the Jewish rulers; of those who were then the only depositaries of the knowledge which then existed in the world, he tells them, that except their righteousness should very far exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, they should in no case—or, upon no account whatever, enter into the kingdom of heaven.

With a like view, our Lord proceeds to correct in detail the highly vitiated morality which then prevailed, in points of great and essential importance, and to introduce in its stead, such a purity of heart and rectitude of morals as would render them the worthy subjects of the Messiah's kingdom.

The whole of this language, it must be observed, was addressed to those whom he had styled the fall of
the earth and the light of the world, and therefore it appears to me, evident, that he could not mean, by these phrases, to describe the apostles exclusively, but the Jewish nation, which he however intimates had so corrupted themselves as to have nearly lost their usefulness. — If the faith hath lost its favour, it is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men. This was, unhappily, and notoriously the fact, with respect to this infatuated and incorrigible nation. They soon lost their distinguished pre-eminence, particularly in a religious point of view, and were, and still continue to be, even to a proverb, cast out and trodden under foot the objects of derision and contempt among all nations.

If the preceding interpretation of the 13th and 14th verses, in the chapter under consideration, shall be found to be just — there cannot be any difficulty in giving to the verse immediately following, a precise and determinate meaning, a meaning which is replete with sound reasoning, and which perfectly harmonizes with the metaphor of the Jews being the light of the world. V. 15, Men do not light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light to all that are in the house. As if he had said — ye Jews have been appointed by Providence to be the light of the world, upon the same principle and for the same purpose that men light a candle in their houses, namely, that all who are in them, map
may enjoy the benefit of its light. This being the design of men, in their humble spheres of action, in common life, it is for a like purpose, but a far more noble and important one, that God has placed you in the super-eminent situation which you now enjoy. In this view, how natural and how forcible is the exhortation which our Lord founds upon it. So let your light shine before men, you who are the light of the world, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

It seems then, from this view of this part of our Lord's sermon on the mount, to have been his design, first, to give his hearers correct views of the dispositions which would qualify them for becoming the worthy subjects of the Messiah's kingdom, and then to remind them of the peculiar privileges which they, as Jews, enjoyed for preserving and diffusing the true knowledge of God, and, in this manner, to stimulate them to improve the advantages which they possessed!

I shall not enter further into the particulars of this sermon upon the mount, than to observe the effect which it had upon his hearers. St. Matthew relates that, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one having authority and not as the Scribes. Their astonishment arose, probably, from their hearing him speak a language so foreign to
their own preconceived ideas of the nature of the Messiah's character, as well as from the authoritative and commanding manner in which he delivered it.

In the eighth and ninth chapters of St. Matthew, we find the Evangelist narrating a great variety of miracles which our Lord wrought, upon divers occasions, eminently calculated to arrest their attention to him, as an extraordinary personage, and to impress upon his hearers the most favourable opinion of the peculiar excellence of his character. This narration concludes with an observation of the Evangelist, plainly indicating, what was the great design of these miracles, ch. ix. 35, And Jesus went through all the cities and villages of Judea, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching to ἐυαγγελιον της βασιλείας, the glad tidings of the kingdom; i.e. of the kingdom of the Messiah, which he had announced to be at hand, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

The performance of such wonderful miracles of benevolence, as was naturally to be expected, drew great multitudes of people after him. In the following verse therefore the evangelist relates, that when Jesus saw the multitudes he was moved with compassion towards them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Upon this occasion, he said to his disciples, ver. 37, 38, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers
labourers are few; i.e. there were many who were well disposed to be better instructed, but there were but few to instruct them. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.

It is in this connection that the tenth chapter, with singular propriety, opens with an account of our Lord’s investing his twelve disciples with a power of working miracles, and more particularly with giving them a commission to aid him in announcing the near approach of the Messiah’s kingdom.

V. 1. And when he had called to him his twelve disciples, he gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of disease. And be commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and enter not into any city of the Samaritans; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel: And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven, or of the Messiah, is at hand.

This commission to announce the near approach of the Messiah’s kingdom, bears every mark of the truth of the history, and of unity of design in the pursuit of our Lord’s great object. And the very choice which he made seems to have been eminently calculated to correct the lofty ideas which had been formed, of his being a temporal prince to conduct them to conquest and to empire. “Our Lord,” says Mr. Maltby, “could not have struck at the very root of the general received opinion concerning the Messiah, more directly, than by the choice
choice of associates, mean in their circumstances, humble, and even vilified in their occupation, and destitute both of talents and knowledge. Such associates were little suited to promote the views of a prince and a conqueror; and the selection of them was plainly a renunciation of that pomp and distinction which were generally conceived to be essential to the restorer of Israel."

In giving his disciples a commission of such great importance, it was evidently necessary that our Lord should, at the same time, give them such directions for the regulation of their conduct, as the nature of the service in which they were to be engaged, and the peculiar circumstances and the exigences of the times so urgently required. And here again it must carefully be noticed, that it was evidently our Lord's object to discourage the remotest idea of their being the ambassadors of a temporal prince. While he empowers them to heal the sick, to cleanse the lepers, to raise the dead, and to cast out devils; they were to provide neither gold nor silver, nor brass in their purses, nor scrip for their journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves. The reason of their being thus totally unprovided, our Lord very concisely states, as follows: *The workman is worthy of his hire.* They were engaged in the public service, and had a right to be maintained by the public.

* See Maltby's Illustrations, p. 85-6.

"To convey to his companions a jufter notion of his pre-
tensions
In the execution of their commission, our Lord goes on, in the 16th and following verses, to tell them of the difficulties which they must expect to meet with, and that it would require the utmost exertion of their prudence and discretion to discharge the duties of their office with success. **Behold,** I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves—Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they shall scourge you in their synagogues, and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony to them and the Gentiles, how much the true nature of my character has been mistaken. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that same hour, or, more properly, at that same time, what ye shall speak; for it is not ye that speak from your own wisdom, but it is the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.

In the 21st and 22d verses, our Lord proceeds to tell them of the extremity of persecution which they would have to encounter in the faithful discharge of the duties of their office. Moreover, tensions and his destination," says Mr. Maltby, "and to guard them from entertaining any hope of worldly prosperity or comfort, in consequence of being thus preferred to their countrymen, he expressly warned them of the persecutions they must undergo, and enjoined them strictly not to fear them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul." Ibid. p. 86,
brother shall deliver up brother to death, and a father his child, and children shall rise up against their parents, and they shall cause them to be put to death. And to shew, in the strongest manner possible, the extreme violence of the opposition which they must expect to meet with in the faithful discharge of their duty, our Lord adds, that they should be hated by all men for his name's sake.

Here the attentive reader cannot fail to observe, to use the language of Mr. Richards upon another occasion of a similar nature, "that our Lord represents to his disciples that they were destined to the most heavy calamities which human nature can endure; not only to prisons and to death, but to the general hatred of mankind." And this very able writer very properly adds, "Surely the Spirit of truth, and a certain prescience of the efficacy of the divine assistance, with which he intended to support them, could alone have prompted him to make such an unwelcome representation, at a moment when every encouragement was required. An impostor, in commending a pretended revelation to the zeal of his deluded followers, would have endeavoured to fire their imaginations by expatiating upon its final triumphs, and delineating, in the brightest colours, scenes of permanent prosperity and splendor; while the intermediate difficulties to which its propagation might appear to be subject, would have been either entirely omitted, or represented in the weakest and most general terms,
terms, as unworthy of the serious consideration of sincere and able supporters."

These observations of Mr. Richards, as hath already been observed, are applied to the time when our Lord, upon his approaching crucifixion, predicted the persecutions which they would have to endure; but they seem, with equal force, to apply to his declarations to them upon the same subject at this more early period. And indeed it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for a person who does not fully enter into the sentiments and prejudices of the disciples of our Lord upon the subject of *the coming of the Messiah*, to imagine the extreme surprize and astonishment which this remarkable prediction of the mighty sufferings which they would have to encounter, must necessarily have produced upon their minds; for though they could not, perhaps, even upon their own principles, have expected to have been entirely exempted from all sufferings in the attainment of the great object of their ambition, yet it was not possible for them to have entertained any idea of such mighty opposition, at least from their own countrymen, as to be delivered up to the great councils of their nation, to be scourged in their synagogues, and to be hated by all men, for proclaiming tidings which were equally grateful, and expected

* See Mr. Richard's Bampton Lectures, p. 200.
with an ardour at least equal to their own, by the whole Jewish nation.

Our Lord appears, most evidently, to have been fully sensible of the effect which his prediction of such mighty opposition, from a quarter so entirely unexpected, must necessarily have had upon their minds. And his immediately proceeding to offer such encouraging considerations to their attention, as might enable them, with becoming fortitude and magnanimity, to execute the duties of their office, must, in the estimation of all good judges of the nature of evidence, be admitted as a strong additional proof of the authenticity of the history.

It will be necessary to take particular notice of these encouragements, because among them there is one which Mr. Gibbon has totally misunderstood, and upon which he probably founded his objection, that our Lord foretold his second coming in the generation in which he lived.

The first consolatory consideration which our Lord thought it proper to offer to the attention of his disciples, was what could not but have had a considerable effect upon their minds, viz. that by perseverance in the faithful discharge of their duty, they would not, ultimately, fail of success. V. 22. *He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.* This declaration they could not, I think, have understood in any other sense, than that, notwithstanding
standing the opposition which they might meet with, they should at length attain the great object of their wishes. At the same time it is not improbable that, though they understood him in this confined sense, he had a farther and more noble view in these words, viz. that by a faithful discharge of their duty, their *final salvation* would be secured. But, even in the former sense, his language plainly conveyed to them this very important intimation, that they must not expect the attainment of the great object of their expectations, without diligently and faithfully performing their duty, whatever difficulties they might meet with, in the execution of it.

Another consoling consideration, of great importance, in the trying circumstances in which they would sometimes find themselves, was that, in very pressing exigencies, it would be lawful and even necessary to save themselves from the dangers to which they might be exposed, by flying from and endeavouring to avoid them. V. 23. *When they persecute you in this city, flee ye to another.* They were not unnecessarily to expose themselves to danger; nor, when they were unavoidably exposed to it, were they to neglect all honourable means of escaping from it. I shall be excused if I observe here, how extremely remote this direction was from what would have been given by one under the influence of enthusiasm. Enthusiasts are

E 3 commonly
commonly observed to court instead of flying from persecution.

But neither of these considerations would, of themselves, have been sufficient to have animated the disciples of our Lord to endure the troubles which he had taught them to expect, without having their minds particularly directed to a given period of time, beyond which their expectations of the coming of the Messiah would not be deferred; when the kingdom of heaven should no longer be at hand, but actually come. Our Lord appears to have been thoroughly sensible of the absolute necessity of a declaration to this purpose, and therefore he not only tells them, that they should ultimately be successful in their expectation of the coming of the Messiah, and that, in the mean time, it would be lawful, and even expedient in cases of imminent danger, to flee from one city to another; but he immediately added, and that in the most pointed and explicit, but at the same time in the most cautious terms, that they should not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man came. He did not, it must carefully be observed, say that he himself was the Messiah, but that they should not have gone over the cities of Israel, in the execution of the duties of their commission, till they should be satisfied that the Son of Man, the Messiah, was actually come. Such an

* There is nothing in the other evangelists parallel to this verse.
assurance as this, to men whose views at this pe-
riod were invariably directed towards the expect-
tation of a Messiah to come, was absolutely and in-
dispensably necessary. And it is in the highest
degree probable, that if it had not been given,
they must, upon their own principles, and indeed
upon the common principles of human nature,
have rejected him, notwithstanding the high re-
gard which they may justly be supposed to have
entertained for the peculiar excellence of his per-
sonal character; for, without such an assurance,
they would have wanted the most essential, and to
them, particularly at this important period, the
most powerful motive for facing the dangers which
had, in such forcible terms, been impressed upon
their minds.

It is not easy to imagine that our Lord's disciples
could have entertained any other idea of the coming
here mentioned, than of the coming of the Messiah,
or of the kingdom of heaven, which he had announced
to be at hand; for to that coming it is evident,
beyond all reasonable dispute, their whole attention
was originally directed. With a belief that Jesus
might possibly be the Messiah, they had joined him,
and they had lent a willing ear to his instructions,
in the hope that he would give them such in-
formation concerning him as they wanted. And
the very circumstance of their having just been in-
vested with a commission to announce the near ap-
proach of the Messiah's kingdom, naturally and ne-
E 4 cessarily
cessarily led them to understand the coming of the Son of Man, of the coming of the Messiah. Nor is there, in the subsequent part of the chapter, a single sentence but what relates to their conduct in executing the duties of their commission, in announcing the near approach of the Messiah's kingdom; so that the phrase, the coming of the Son of Man, is so fenced in, if the expression may be allowed, both by the preceding and subsequent context, that it can have no other meaning than the coming of the Messiah. And to interpret it in any other sense, is to violate all the rules of sound reasoning, and entirely to disregard, not only our Lord's original language that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, but the whole tenor of the gospel history.

Besides,

"Jesus Christ," says Mr. Le Clerc, "gives here some instructions to his apostles, not only for their first embassy, but for the others which they should undertake after his ascension. What is here said has clearly a relation to these last; for it is evident that the apostles soon afterwards returned to Christ. See Mark vi. 30. Luke ix. 10. They did not even experience any ill treatment from the Jews, who constrained them to flee from city to city while they followed their master upon earth. This coming of our Lord, of which he here speaks, ought then to be understood of something which happened after his ascension, and there is nothing to which this expression and what our Lord says, agrees better than to the ruin of the Jews. The holy scripture often says that God comes, when he punishes those whom he had treated as if he had been absent. See Isaiah xxxv. 4, &c. and what interpreters have said upon this passage. Jesus Christ, according to
Besides, if our Lord had meant, by this phrase, the second and glorious coming of the Son of Man in the clouds to judge all mankind at the last day, it would, at that period at least, have been utterly impossible, if the disciples had so understood him, not to have forsaken him immediately as an impostor, as not answering their avowed expectations; for they then most incontrovertibly entertained ideas which were totally incompatible with such an event. Nor is it easy to imagine how any one claiming the character of the Messiah, should have had the most distant conception of such an event taking place in his own time, any more than his followers, much less that, in a series of argument, manifestly intended for the encouragement of his disciples under peculiar difficulties, he would have made use of one, which must either have been wholly unintelligible to them, or must have had an immediate and direct tendency to discourage all their expectations of his being the Messiah.

I have been the more earnest in endeavouring to fix the precise meaning of this verse, because, if it be understood in Mr. Gibbon's sense, it must fix to this manner of speaking, says here, that before the apostles should have gone through the cities of Israel, he should come; that is to say, that he should punish the Jews for their incredulity and their persecutions of his apostles. In reality a thousand evils befell the Jews from the moment they began to ill-treat the apostles, as may be seen in Josephus's History of the Jewish War, an
an indelible stain upon the gospel history; and the reader, who so understands it, must unavoidably be impressed with an unfavourable opinion of it; whereas, if he understands it of the coming of the Messiah, he cannot but feel how much it harmonizes with our Lord's original language, that the kingdom of heaven, or of the Messiah, was at hand, and he will be constrained to consider it as among the most striking evidences of the authenticity of the gospel history.

Besides the internal proofs from the chapter itself, that the whole of it relates exclusively to the commission of the apostles to announce the near approach of the Messiah's kingdom; the evangelist has, in the beginning of the xith chapter, very distinctly stated the fact in the following terms, chap. xi. i. And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding, or, as the original word διατάσσω properly signifies, of laying down rules for the regulation of the conduct of his disciples, in the execution of the duties of their commission, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities.

It is in this connection that the evangelist introduces an account of a message from John the Baptist, while under confinement, to Jesus, inquiring into the nature of his claim. Ver. 2. Now when John had heard in prison the works of Christ, or rather of Jesus, for he was not yet acknowledged as the Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said to him, Art thou he that should come; he whom we, as Jews,
Jews, are anxiously expecting, or are we to look for another?

This message is one, among a multiplicity of unequivocal proofs, of the general expectation of the Messiah, at the time when our Lord made his appearance in the world. And his answer to the Baptist's question is well worthy of notice, not only as it shews his cautious and guarded manner of conducting himself, when questioned concerning the true nature of his character, but because it will afford an opportunity of presenting to the reader another striking and incontestable proof of the true meaning of the phrase, the kingdom of heaven, in a connection which cannot easily be mistaken.

The messengers of John, it appears, addressed our Lord in the hearing of the multitude, and, upon this account, it was particularly necessary that he should be extremely cautious and guarded with respect to the answer which he should return to the Baptist's message. That he might, however, have the desired information upon the subject of his inquiry, our Lord, instead of directly and explicitly acknowledging that he was the Messiah, referred them to his excellent instructions, and to the many wonderful works which he had wrought. Ver. 4, 5, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up: and, in exact harmony with the ancient prophecy concerning the Messiah, he adds,
the poor have the gospel preached to them. The verse following is well worthy of notice, as it appears to have a manifest allusion to the prejudices of the Jews concerning the nature of the Messiah's character. V. 6. Blessed is he, whofoever shall not be offended in me. As if he had said, Happy is the man who shall not be offended at my present humble appearance, but shall own me to be the person my works declare me to be, notwithstanding I have none of those worldly honours and emoluments to bestow, which are generally considered as inseparably connected with the coming of the Messiah.

I have been extremely concerned, in my intercourse with society, to find it to be a very prevailing opinion among many, otherwise very sensible men, that the poor ought to be kept in a state of ignorance. To such an opinion, I am happy to say, the gospel gives not the slightest countenance; and if it did, it would deserve to be treated with the utmost contempt. I must contend, that the present sad state of the lower classes of mankind arises, not from their knowing too much, but from their knowing too little. How very differently did St. Paul express himself before King Agrippa.—I would to God that all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds. He was not afraid that too much knowledge would be injurious to them! Indeed I consider it as no trifling evidence of the truth of Christianity, that it was to the poor, who constitute so large a portion of mankind, that the gospel, or good tidings of salvation, were particularly addressed. And it may justly be queried, whether there is not some radical defect in the religious systems of modern times, that the generality of the poor are in so deplorable a state of ignorance.

I cannot
I cannot dismiss this part of the evangelical history without observing, that it appears to me that our Lord's caution, so strongly manifested in not declaring himself to be the Messiah, is a very striking and unequivocal proof of the authenticity of the history; for it was not in our Lord's power, as I have before hinted, publicly to declare that he was the Messiah, without effectually defeating the great purposes of his mission; having none of those proofs to offer of his being the Messiah, which they, one and all, invariably affixed to his character; to wit, that he was a temporal prince, to conduct them to conquest and to empire.

But to return;—when our Lord had dispatched his answer to John's message, he then addressed the multitudes concerning him, in terms the most respectful and honourable to his character, declaring that, among those that were borne of women, there had not arisen one who was greater than John the Baptist. But to shew, in the strongest point of view, the superior excellence of his own character, and the superior importance of the religious establishment which he, as the Messiah, was about to set up, he adds, notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven, or of the Messiah, is greater than he.

In the next chapter in the order of the history, there are several particulars which have an evident reference to the controversy of our Lord with the Jews concerning the nature of the Messiah's character.
ter, which will not be undeserving of the reader's attention. The chapter is introduced by a circumstance which gave great offence to the nice feelings of the superstitious Jews. Chap. xii. 1. At that time Jesus went, on the sabbath day, through the corn, and his disciples were an hungered and began to pluck the ears of corn and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Be bold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day. Upon which our Lord put this question to them: v. 3. Have ye never read what David did, when he and they that were with him were an hungered? How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the consecrated bread, which was not lawful to be eaten but by priests only; and how that, on the sabbath day, the priests in the temple profane the temple and are blameless; the sense of which is, that positive and ritual laws, when they interfere with more important duties, are more honoured in the breach than in the observance. Upon this occasion, our Lord took an opportunity of asserting his own high character, but, as usual, in the language of caution. V. 6. But I say unto you, that in this place is one greater than the temple; i. e. the Lord of the temple. “Therefore,” says Bishop Pearce, “he was superior to any positive law relating to the worship of God, such as their sabbath was.” This our Lord explains more fully and distinctly in the following verse. But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice, or mercy
mercy rather than sacrifice," the commentator just mentioned, "the necessary wants of nature, before the discharge of the positive law of the Sabbath;" ye would not have condemned the guiltless; for the Son of Man, the Messiah, is Lord even of the Sabbath day.

In the case which has now been stated, it may be remarked, that the charge of his disciples breaking the Sabbath was made chiefly with a view to implicate him in the crime; but in that which immediately follows, the attack is made directly upon our Lord himself. V. 9. And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue, and behold there was a man who had his hand withered; and they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day? that they might accuse him. To which our Lord thus replied, v. 11, What man shall there be among you that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it and lift it out? How much better then is a man than a sheep? From this reasoning, which scarcely admitted of any reply, our Lord draws this conclusion, v. 12, Wherefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day. Then said he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand; and he stretched it forth, and it was restored whole as the other. But no force of reasoning, no action of beneficence, however great, appears to have had any effect upon the minds of these unprincipled and worthless men. So far were they from shewing any pleasure at seeing a fellow-
fellow-creature relieved from a grievous malady, the evangelist says, v. 14, They went out and held a council against him, how they might destroy him. They were offended at him for doing an act of real benevolence on the sabbath day; while they themselves, as Dr. Macknight has well observed, were profaning it by an action which would have polluted any day, seeking an opportunity of murdering one who had never done them any harm, but a great deal of good. But when Jesus knew their malicious design, he withdrew himself from thence, and great multitudes followed him, and, notwithstanding the ungrateful treatment he had just met with, be healed them all, and charged them that they should not make him known. And thus, says the evangelist, was fulfilled in him the prophecy of Isaiah, saying, v. 18, Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall show judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive nor cry, shall make no noisy and ostentatious claims to the character of the Messiah; neither shall any man hear his voice affirming those claims in the streets. On the contrary, he withdrew himself as much as possible from public notice, and forbade those whom he had healed to spread abroad his fame. A bruised reed shall not break, and smoking flax shall be not quench, until he send forth judgment unto victory; or, as Dr. Campbell has rendered it, till he render his laws victorious. He shall be so mild and gentle in his demeanour,
demeanour, so attentive to the sentiments and prejudices of the well-disposed, as gradually to establish the truth of his claim to the character of the Messiah. V. 21. And, in his name shall the Gentiles trust.

In the 22d verse, the historian proceeds to relate a miraculous cure which our Lord had effected. Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, or demon, blind and dumb, and he healed him: insomuch that the blind and dumb person both spake and saw. Upon this it is said, v. 23, that all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the Son of David? evidently meaning, by this question, that they supposed that he might be the Christ, or the Messiah, whom they were then so earnestly expecting. Such a question from the mouth of the common people, roused the jealousy, and excited an alarm in the minds of the unprincipled Pharisees, lest they should be induced to acknowledge that he was the Messiah, being themselves regardless of the proof which he had just given that he was, if not the Messiah, at least an extraordinary personage. Unable, however, to deny the reality of the miracle, and unwilling to suffer even a suspicion of his being the Messiah, to get possession of the minds of the common people, they rather chose malignantly to attribute the miracle to his connection with demons. V. 24. But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out demons but by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons.
If ever language was capable of rousing an honest and virtuous indignation, especially when the nature of the miracle which occasioned it is considered, surely this was! But what was the answer of our Lord to the infamous suggestions of these profligate and unprincipled men? Why he descended to reason with them upon the extreme absurdity of their supposition, and that in a language which was, in the highest degree, calm and temperate, and fraught with a strength of argument which nothing could exceed, and which admitted of no reply. V. 25, &c. Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. And if Satan cast out Satan, how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I, by Beelzebub, cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I, by the Spirit of God, cast out devils, then is the kingdom of God come unto you.

By the kingdom of God it is hardly possible to doubt that our Lord here meant the kingdom of the Messiah, which he had announced to be at hand; and it appears to have been the chief object of his discourse, upon this occasion, to prove that the conjecture of the people, which had given such offence to the Pharisees—Is not this the Son of David? was well founded. But while our Lord, in his reply to the shameless and unprincipled cavils of the Scribes and Pharisees, manifested the utmost coolness of temper, and the most perfect self-command,
mand, he nevertheless expressed his most unqualified sense of the heinousness of their crime, in ascribing miracles of the purest benevolence to a diabolical influence, as proceeding from the most rooted depravity, and the most hardened determination of resisting all evidence, however strong, which was not suited to their ambitious and self-interested views. This every one must acknowledge he might have done with the most unruffled temper and the most perfect composure. And, surely, it will be allowed that no occasion could ever have more justly called for a severe censure, than the ascribing a miracle which restored speech and hearing to an unfortunate man, to such a cause! If this was not criminality, in the highest degree, what can deserve the name of criminality?

And here I cannot refrain from observing, that our Lord frequently urged the miracles which he wrought as proofs that he was the Messiah. Go and shew John again those things that ye do hear and see—If I, by the Spirit or power of God cast out devils, then is the kingdom of God come unto you. And yet it seems to be becoming a fashionable doctrine that Christianity requires, in proof of its truth, neither prophecies nor miracles, though the latter are interwoven in almost every page of the gospel history. Indeed it is difficult to conceive upon what principle they can be rejected, without rejecting the whole system. If the miracles of the gospel were not wrought, it is almost impossible to avoid
the conclusion, that the Author of our religion was the greatest impostor that ever existed. And if they were, they afforded evidence, of a very superior kind, of the truth of his mission; for no man could do such miracles except God was with him.

But to return from this digression—our Lord having, from his very forcible and unanswerable reasoning with the Pharisees, drawn the conclusion that the kingdom of God, or of the Messiah, was come, or rather was coming to them, certain of the Scribes appear to have seized with avidity upon this declaration, saying, v. 38, Master, we would see a sign from thee; meaning probably, the sign of the Son of Man, mentioned by the prophet Daniel, coming in the clouds of heaven; which they interpreted, of his coming to take vengeance on their enemies. But he answered, v. 39, and said to them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given to it, such as is expected by you, but the sign of the prophet Jonas; for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

In the two following verses, our Lord compares the conduct of the Jews with that of the Ninevites

* The same word which is used here, is likewise used by St. Paul, 1 Thess. ii. 16, and is applied by him to the destruction of Jerusalem, which was then only approaching. The Greek word here rendered is come, being an aorist, seems to be used for the paulo post futurum, to denote the near approach of the kingdom of heaven, or of the Messiah. See Dr. Benson on 1 Thess. ii. 16, and my Triumphs of Christianity, p. 57.
and of the Queen of Sheba; both of which instances carried a severe censure upon theirs; and he affirms, in strong, but, as usual, in very cautious terms, the high dignity of his own character. V. 41, The men of Nineveh shall rise up in judgment against this generation, and shall condemn it; because they repented at the preaching of Jonas. And, behold a greater than Jonas, meaning himself, is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in judgment against this generation, and shall condemn it; for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold a greater than Solomon is here. The argument is then concluded in the following manner: v. 43, When an unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through parched deserts, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return to my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished, fit for the reception of the guest who had quitted it. Then goeth he and taketh to himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there, and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation. Bishop Pearce has thus concisely expressed the design of this parable. "The more I do for reforming this generation, the worse it will be."

I have dwelt longer upon the consideration of the contents of this chapter, than was perhaps absolutely
solutely necessary; but it seems so strongly to confirm the extreme propriety of viewing the gospel history, as an history of the controversy between our Lord and the Jews concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character, and so accurately fixes the genuine meaning of the phrase, the kingdom of God, in the 28th verse, that the reader will not, I am persuaded, consider his labour lost in the perusal of it. I must not, however, omit to introduce to his notice the conclusion of it; which, for genuine simplicity, and the most correct and refined taste of the superior importance of the duties which men owe to the Supreme Being, most certainly stands without a rival. V. 46, &c. While he was yet talking to the people, behold his mother and his brethren stood without desiring to speak to him. Then one said to him, Behold thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak to thee. But he answered, and said to him that told him, Who is my mother, and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren; for whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother. The force of this historical anecdote is irresistible; and when it is considered as the unpremeditated thought of the moment, it at once shews the superior wisdom and the unrivalled excellence of the mind which dictated it!
The limits which I have prescribed to this work forbid the following the exact order of the history any further. I shall therefore proceed, immediately, to a most interesting and important conversation which arose between our Lord and his disciples, respecting the opinion which was entertained among his countrymen concerning him. And it is thus introduced by the evangelical historian, ch. xvi. 13. When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, or into the country which was under the jurisdiction of Philip, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some Elias; and others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. From this account of the public opinion concerning our Lord, it appears that however various their conjectures concerning him were, all were agreed that he was an extraordinary personage. Our Lord then asked them, What was their own opinion of the nature of his character; or who they thought him to be? V. 15, But whom say ye that I am? To which the apostle Peter, without hesitation, replied, Thou art O Χριστός, the Christ, or the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

Dr. Campbell, speaking of the word Christ, says, "If we were to judge by the common version, or even by most versions into modern tongues, we should consider the word as rather a proper name than an appellative or name of office, and should think of it only as a surname given to our Lord.

The
The reader has here before him an unequivocal proof, not only of the extreme propriety of con-

Our translators have contributed greatly to this mistake, by very seldom prefixing the article before Christ, though it is rarely wanting in the original. The word Christ was at first as much an appellative as the word baptist was, and the one was as regularly accompanied with the article as the other. Yet our translators, who always say the Baptist, have, one would think, studiously avoided saying the Christ. This may appear to superficial readers an inconsiderable difference; but the addition of the article will be found, when attended to, of real consequence for conveying the meaning in English, with the same perspicuity and propriety with which it is conveyed in Greek. So much virtue there is in the article, which, in our idiom, is never prefixed to the name of a man, though it is invariably prefixed to a name of office (unless where some pronoun, or other appropriating expression, renders it unnecessary), that without it the sense is always darkened, and sometimes marred. Thus in such expressions as these: This Jesus whom I preach unto you is Christ. Paul testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. Showing that Jesus was Christ: the unlearned reader forms no distinct apprehension, as the common application of the words leads him uniformly to consider Jesus and Christ as no other than the name and the surname of the same person. It would have conveyed to such a reader precisely the same meaning, to have said, Paul testified to the Jews that Christ was Jesus; and so of the rest. The article alone, therefore, in such cases, adds considerable light to the expression; yet no more than what the words of the historian manifestly convey to every reader who understands his language. It should be, therefore, Paul testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ, or the Messiah, &c. Many other examples might be brought to the same purpose; but these are sufficient. See Campbell's Dissertations, vol. i. p. 169, 170. Quarto edition.
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considering the gospel history as an history of the controversy concerning the nature of the Messiah's character, but of the disciples themselves not having, till this period, acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah. And indeed, if the state of things, at the time when this conversation took place, be attentively considered; it will appear that it required no small exercise of faith in the integrity of our Lord's character to have made this noble confession; for there were then no signs, and indeed could not be, from the nature of his character, which, till after this period, his disciples had invariably affixed to it, which could at all have led them to think their favourite idea of a worldly kingdom was about to be realized. And it is particularly deserving of notice, from St. Peter's account of the sentiments of the people at large, that their opinion of him was perfectly singular: some saying that he was John the Baptist; some that he was Elias; and others that he was Jeremiah, or one of the prophets; but none that he was Ο Χριστός, the Christ, or the Messiah, but themselves. This has been thought extraordinary, and it has been considered as not easily to be accounted for, from the known and acknowledged sentiments which they then unquestionably held concerning the nature of the Messiah's character, which most certainly were not materially different from those of the rest of their countrymen.

But surely there is nothing contrary to probability
ility in their supposing that he might be the Messiah whom they so earnestly expected, though he had, as yet, not given them the grand distinguishing proof of it which they affixed to it, namely, his being a temporal prince. They had heard him declare that the kingdom of heaven, or of the Messiah, was at hand; and in consequence of that declaration they had joined him, upon the belief, or at least upon the hope, that he might possibly be the Messiah. They had themselves received a commission from him to announce to their countrymen the glad tidings of its near approach. They had seen him perform numerous miracles, which very fully evinced that he was an extraordinary personage; and this, from their own account, was the general opinion. And, from an intimate acquaintance with him, they did not entertain the least doubt of the perfect integrity of his personal character. He had likewise publicly declared, that he was greater than Jonas, greater than the queen of the south, greater than Solomon, and greater than the temple, though he had not declared that he was the Messiah. If to all this it be added, that they had frequent opportunities of observing the superior excellence and sublimity of his instructions, his unaffected piety to God, his unexampled disinterestedness, and his generous benevolence and philanthropy; and it will, perhaps, in no respect be found to be improbable or unnatural that they should declare that they believed that he was the Messiah. Besides, it should
should be observed that, by their continuing to follow him with such unshaken perseverance, they pretty strongly declared their full expectation that the time would come when he would publicly manifest himself as the Messiah.

But this premature declaration of St. Peter, as it has been termed, that Jesus was the Messiah, is, perhaps, best accounted for by our Lord himself, in the remarkable eulogium which St. Peter's noble confession drew from him, and fully justifies the supposition that his excellent instructions, and the wonderful works which he had wrought, had compelled him to make it. V. 17, Blessed art thou Simon, son of Jonah; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven: q. d. Had you consulted flesh and blood only, your national prejudices and secular views, with respect to the nature of the Messiah's character, you would never, under the present circumstances and appearances of things, have made the acknowledgment which you have now done; but the doctrines which I have taught you, and the miracles which I have performed in the name and by the authority of my Father, have, upon this occasion, plainly influenced your judgment, contrary to all human appearances, and extorted from you a confession which no other consideration could have induced you to have made. It is, indeed, hardly possible to suppose that the disciples could have avoided giving our Lord a considerable degree of credit,
credit, even upon their own principles, especially after they had such opportunities of knowing his general character, that he would, at a proper time, give them the necessary proofs that he actually was the Messiah. And that they did, in fact, give him that credit, and that Peter’s declaration that he was the Messiah, was founded upon it, seems to require no other proof than the questions which they put to him at a period considerably subsequent to this; for when our Lord had been predicting the destruction of Jerusalem, they were so amazed and confounded at the prediction, so contrary to all their ideas of the nature of the Messiah’s character, that they asked him, When shall these things be? And if, as you say, they must be, What shall be the sign of thy coming? meaning, as will hereafter very fully appear, of his coming as the Messiah. And, even after our Lord’s resurrection, they again asked him, in terms which appear to be free from all ambiguity, When he would restore the kingdom to Israel?

This remarkable confession of St. Peter, being contrary to all present appearances, and to the general ideas which then prevailed among the Jews concerning the nature of the Messiah’s character, it was evidently absolutely necessary that the disciples should not be suffered to make their opinion of him public. Our Lord, whose prudent attention to the circumstances of things, appears never for a moment to have forsaken him, foreseeing the injurious consequences to the success of his mission of
of such a public disclosure, thought it proper, upon the same principles and for the same reasons which had hitherto influenced his own conduct, to give his disciples a strict injunction not to tell any one that he was the Messiah. V. 20, Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was ο Χριστός, the Christ, or the Messiah.

This caution, it has just been hinted, perfectly harmonizes with our Lord's general conduct, as well as with his admirable precept to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. And it was, for this obvious reason, upon this occasion absolutely necessary; because, if once such an opinion should be disseminated amongst the great body of the people, by his own disciples, by those who were known to be upon the most intimate footing with him, it might not only have created popular tumults and insurrections in his favour, which he at all times appears most carefully to have avoided; but, in all human probability, it would have entirely defeated the great and important purposes of his mission. The Author of Christianity not founded on Argument, has, in his peculiarly insidious manner, dwelt much upon this prohibition of our Lord, and in general upon his extreme caution in refusing to declare that he was the Messiah; but the reason here stated for this conduct, appears to be so satisfactory, that even infidelity itself must be

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* See the same prohibition Mark viii. 30. Luke ix. 21.
obliged to acknowledge its force. And, in the present instance, our Lord's prohibition must be considered as one genuine and authentic evidence of the truth of the history; for it was upon no account safe or proper, under existing circumstances, to have divulged the opinion that he was the Messiah, when, from the disciples' own statement, it appears that they were singular in that opinion.

But our Lord did not stop here. He not only foresaw the absolute necessity of this prohibition; but as he had, by his decided approbation of St. Peter's confession, acknowledged that he was the Messiah, he clearly perceived the further necessity of effectually checking any propensity which they might have to break through his injunction, and of repressing any secular views which might now, with redoubled force, begin to operate upon the minds of the disciples, with respect to their beloved Master's assuming the character of the Messiah! For, it must carefully be noted, that though they had expressly acknowledged that he was the Messiah, they still continued to retain all their worldly prejudices concerning the nature of his character. One decisive proof of this is, that even after his resurrection they said to him, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? It was, therefore, with the most consummate wisdom that our Lord chose this opportunity of informing them, in a very particular and circumstantial manner, of the sufferings which he himself, in the course of his ministry,
ministry, had to undergo. And nothing, surely, could have been more admirably adapted for the obtaining of his purpose than such a discovery.

V. 21. From that time forth, i.e. from the time that he had charged them to tell no man that he was the Christ, or the Messiah, began Jesus to shew to his disciples, how that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the Elders and chief Priests and Scribes, and be killed, and raised again the third day.

When our Lord had forewarned his disciples of the great troubles to which they would be exposed in the execution of their commission of announcing the near approach of the Messiah's kingdom, there is not the slightest intimation of their having expostulated with him upon the subject, or that they shewed the least symptom of dissatisfaction at the hardships of their lot; though he, at the same time, particularly informed them that they were such as awaited himself; and for this reason, probably, that they could not, even upon their own principles, have expected that the great purposes of his mission, as the Messiah, could be attained, without both themselves and their beloved Master being exposed to some difficulties. But no sooner did our Lord enter into further particulars, and foretell, in the closest connection with an acknowledgment made by themselves, and with our Lord's decided approbation of that acknowledgment, that he was the Messiah, that such sufferings awaited him
him as would terminate in a violent and igno-
minious death, and that from the hands of his own
countrymen, from the elders, the chief priests, and
the scribes, than they immediately took the alarm;
and well they might; for sufferings like these, and
from such a quarter too, were so totally incom-
patible with all the ideas which they had previously
affixed to the Messiah's character, that they could
no longer keep silence. V. 22, Then Peter took him
and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee,
Lord; this shall not be unto thee.

This language pretty strongly marks St. Peter's
sentiments of our Lord's prediction. But the
evangelical historians have expressed, with peculiar
emphasis and energy, the extreme astonishment of
the disciples at this deeply affecting, and, to them,
at that period more especially, most unwelcome
intelligence; for in the next chapter, upon the
same subject being renewed, St. Matthew says,
ver. 23, εὐπνιθήσαν σφόδρα, they were filled with ex-
treme grief at the news. St. Mark's expression is,
if possible, still more forcible; for it very strongly
expresses the extreme perplexity into which they
were thrown in consequence of this prediction,
chap. ix. 32, οὐκ θυμῶν το πέπα, they knew not what to
make of the matter. And St. Luke has precisely
the same sentiment, with this very expressive and
remarkable addition, chap. ix. 45, that it was
παρακαλημένου απ' αυτών, hid from them, or so
wrapt up in darkness and mystery that they could
not
not tell what it could mean; i.e. their prejudices concerning the nature of the Messiah's character plainly prevented them from comprehending how such a prediction could possibly be compatible with his being the Messiah. In the 18th chapter this prediction is again repeated, and St. Luke says, ver. 34, They understood none of these things, and this matter, στὸ πέμα τούτου, was hid from them; neither knew they the things which were spoken; i.e. they did not comprehend its meaning.

The evidence that the prejudices of our Lord's disciples were the real causes of their extreme astonishment at his prediction, and of their not understanding him, it would be utterly impossible for any one who reflects with impartial attention upon the nature and circumstances of the case, to entertain a doubt of, even if our Lord had not himself particularly pointed it out; but his reply to St. Peter's exclamation, that no such sufferings as he had predicted should befall him, renders it absolutely decisive. Matt. xvi. 23, Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence, or rather, as Bishop Pearce has translated and paraphrased it, "thou art an adversary unto me, in throwing difficulties in my way, by urging the motive of self-preservation against my going on with what I am about to accomplish;" for thou favourest not τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ the things of God, or spiritual things; but τὰ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, the things of men, or temporal things; most evidently alluding, in the former expression, to the spiritual nature.
nature of the Messiah's kingdom; and in the latter, to their expectation that the Messiah was to be a temporal prince.

St. Luke has given a very strong, and, as it should seem, an unequivocal proof, that prejudice was the real cause of their not understanding our Lord; for, upon the evangelist's saying, that they understood not his prediction concerning his death, that it was hid from them, and that they perceived it not, he adds, in the following verse, that then there arose a reasoning among themselves which of them should be greatest, i.e. who should fill the most exalted stations in the kingdom of the Messiah. This I think shews, not only that they did not understand what our Lord's prediction could possibly mean, but that they did not at all imagine that it would take place. A similar contention is also recorded by St. Matthew upon another occasion, chap. xviii. 1. And it appears, from the close of the preceding chapter, to have been occasioned by our Lord's having wrought a miracle to satisfy the demands of the gatherers of the tribute money; for it is said, that at that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, Who is, or rather, who shall be, the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, or of the Messiah? It seems as if this miracle had fired their imaginations with the prospect of the splendid scenes which they should enjoy, when the time came that our Lord should declare himself as the Messiah; having in this instance, as well as in many others, shown that
that he had all nature at his command. All these circumstances must, I think, be admitted as authentic evidences of the truth of the history; presenting to the mind of the reader, at least, as fair a claim to credit, as any history, ancient or modern, can possibly produce. And it may not, perhaps, be improperly added, that they are evidences of that kind, that they will lose nothing of their weight by any lapse of time; for if historical evidence be genuine, it possesses this very important advantage, that the more closely it is scrutinized, the more satisfactory it will appear, whether it be at the distance of one, or of thousands of years.

It being then indisputably evident, that the disciples of our Lord were influenced, chiefly by views of worldly ambition, when they so strongly remonstrated with him on account of his prediction of his sufferings and death, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee; What line of conduct was it natural for him upon such an occasion to pursue? What line of conduct did he actually pursue? Why, precisely that which he had with so much firmness and intrepidity already pursued, when he gave them their commission to announce the near approach of the Messiah's kingdom; for as, in that instance, he did not shun to declare to them, in the strongest terms, what sufferings they would have to undergo, and the necessity of a
steady perseverance in the faithful discharge of their duty, whatever might be the consequence; so he doth here. Ver. 24, If any man will come after me; i.e. if he will be my disciple, let him deny himself; and take up his cross and follow me: q.d. the sufferings and consequent death which I have predicted as about to come upon me, have given you great offence, as opposing your lofty and ambitious views of worldly prosperity under the reign of your Messiah; but I now tell you again, that if you would follow me with fidelity, you must deny yourselves, by giving up those worldly pursuits which have obtained such a powerful ascendency in your minds, and you must take up your cross as I do mine, and must expect to meet with the same, or similar sufferings, in the faithful discharge of your duty. Our Lord then adds, ver. 25, nearly in the words which he had formerly made use of in chap. x. 39, Whosoever will save his life, by meanly shrinking from his duty, on account of any such sufferings, shall lose it. And whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, shall find it; i.e. he shall find it in a future state, where everlasting life shall be bestowed upon him, as a reward for his fidelity. In the two following verses, the superior advantages of preferring duty to interest, however extensive, are set in the strongest light which it is in the power of language to convey; for, says our Lord, What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world.
world and lose his own life? or, What shall a man give in exchange for his life? No equivalent, in the whole world, can be found for it.

Although it cannot, I think, be denied that our Lord, in the use of this language, had an eye to the rewards of a future state, yet it appears to me, that he intended to intimate to his disciples, that by a faithful adherence to him, they would be preserved from the awful calamities which were coming

The note of Dr. Whitby upon these verses appears to me to be deserving of attention. "That the word ἄλφα should be here rendered life, rather than soul, in the sublimer acceptation of the word, seems highly probable, from these considerations: 1st, because Christ, who came to save men's souls, could not require of any persons that they should lose their souls in the worst sense, but only that they should lay down their lives for His sake. 2d, Because in the Old Testament this phrase continually occurreth in this sense, where ἐπέθεεν τήν ἄλφα, Prov. xiii. 3. xvi. 17. xix. 16. xxiii. 14. ἐκεῖν ἡν ἄλφα. Amos ii. 14, 15. is to preserve life.—ἐκεῖν ἡν ἄλφα, Psalm vi. 4-7. i. 2, is to deliver us from death.—ἀπόλεσαι τήν ἄλφα, Psalm xxvi. 9. to lose life or die. 3. Because it frequently occurs in profane authors in this sense, as when we read in Agathius (L. 3. p. 80.) What if we gain all Persia, τοι ὡς ᾿λφας ἐξειμοεῖν, but lose our lives? And Achilles, in Homer, (ll. I. ν. 401.) says, οὐ γὰρ ἐμοὶ ἄλφας αὐτόξιν αλλα. Nothing is comparable to my life."

Dr. Campbell says, "That our Lord has a principle eye to the loss of the soul, or of eternal life, there can be no doubt. But this sentiment is couched under a proverb, which, in familiar use, concerns only the present life. That ἄλφα is susceptible of both meanings is beyond a question." See Campbell in loc.
upon the Jewish nation. And from an attentive perusal of the phraseology made use of by our Lord, in describing those calamities, I am strongly inclined to think that he meant to assert this, when, in the 27th verse, he says, *For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, or rather with his messengers, and then he shall reward every one according to his works.*

The present Bishop of London, having quoted the following passage, Matt. xxiv. 30, *They shall see the Son 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, &c.* says, "Few people, I believe, read these verses without supposing that they refer entirely to the day of judgment, many of these expressions being actually applied to that great event in the very next chapter, and in other parts of scripture: and indeed several eminent men and learned commentators are of that opinion, and imagine that our Lord here makes a transition from the destruction of Jerusalem to the end of the world, conceiving that such very bold figures of speech could not, with propriety, be applied to the subversion and extinction of any city or state, however great and powerful. But," says the bishop, in my opinion very properly, "the fact is, that these very same metaphors do frequently in scripture denote the destruction of nations, cities, and kingdoms."
Again, the learned bishop, upon Matt. xxvi. 64, Hereafter ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven, says, "Sitting at the right hand of power, means sitting at the right hand of God, to whom the Jews sometimes give the appellation of power; and coming in the clouds of heaven, was with the Jews a characteristic mark of the Messiah. And the whole passage relates not to the final judgment, but to the coming of Christ to execute vengeance on the Jews in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans."*

It will hereafter appear, with an evidence bordering upon demonstration, that both these passages relate exclusively to the destruction of Jerusalem. In the mean time, it appears to me highly probable, that when our Lord says, in the verse under consideration, The Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, he refers likewise to that awful event, especially as it is said in the verse immediately following, Verily, I say unto you, there are some standing here who shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

The only objection to this interpretation of the

And in page 160, he says, "Our Lord himself explains what is meant by the coming of the Son of Man, in the 27th, 28th, and 37th verses of this chapter," to wit, of his "coming to execute judgment on the guilty Jews, by the total overthrow of their temple, their city, and their government."

47th verse of any weight, that I can perceive, is, that the concluding sentence, the rendering to every man according to his works, has been supposed to be applicable only to the final judgment. But this and similar phrases are frequently used in the Old Testament to denote the execution of temporal judgments, as will appear from the note below.¹

Mr. Le Clerc, in his note upon the 28th verse, says, "Jesus Christ has repeated this promise to St. John, chap. xxi. 22, of his gospel. This circum-

¹ Jeremiah xvii. 10, I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. Chap. xxi. 14, I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings. Chap. xxxii. 19, Thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men, to give to every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. The same prophet, speaking of the downfall of Babylon, says, chap. 1. 29, Recompense her according to her work. Hosea xii. 2, The Lord hath a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him.

It appears to me, that all these passages have a special relation to temporal calamities; and I must confess I see nothing forced or unnatural in applying the verse in question to the destruction of Jerusalem. In my work which is before the public, entitled, The Triumphs of Christianity, &c. I had thought differently of its meaning; nor would I be very positive which is the true one. In adopting this, I have thought it the most probable of the two; but the reader, who compares them, will form his own judgment which is to be preferred.
stance shews clearly that we ought to understand the coming of our Lord, of which he here speaks, of what happened during the life of St. John. He says, moreover, 1. that it shall be with his angels; 2. that it shall be to render to every one according to his actions. We find nothing at that period to which these two circumstances can agree, but the destruction of Jerusalem."

I cannot finish my observations upon the chapter under consideration, without remarking that the 28th verse is probably one of those passages upon which Mr. Gibbon has founded his declaration that our Lord foretold his second coming in the generation in which he lived. But, it must be evident beyond dispute, that the conversation with which it is connected was not about his second, but his first coming as the Messiah. And, as our Lord had predicted his sufferings and death, which the disciples could not conceive to be compatible with his being the Messiah, it was indispensably necessary that he should fix a period when they should be satisfied that he had assumed the character of the Messiah; for, without an assurance to this purpose, it is not to be imagined that the disciples could have continued to follow him.

Besides, it ought to be observed, in order to fix the true sense of this verse, that the original declaration of our Lord, that the kingdom of heaven, or of the Messiah, was at hand, naturally leads the reader
reader to understand his coming in his kingdom, of his coming as the Messiah; for it can now, I think, need no proof that the gospel history is an history of the controversy concerning the nature of the Messiah's character, and was intended to confirm the truth of his assertion, that his kingdom was near at hand. Verily, I say unto you, there are some standing here who shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. m

The evangelists have not informed us whether this assurance of our Lord of his coming, as the Messiah, had the effect of removing any doubts arising from his prediction of his sufferings and death; but, from the history of the transfiguration, related in the beginning of the next chapter, it may, I think, fairly be inferred, that though it prevented their deserting him, yet they were by no means satisfied that such a prediction was compatible with the nature of the Messiah's character. This history of the transfiguration was evidently calculated to remove this dissatisfaction, and to give his disciples a new and distinguished proof that he was the Messiah. That this was the chief design of the transfiguration, appears to me evident beyond a doubt, from the conclusion, ver. 5, While Peter yet spake, behold a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.

m See Mark viii. 38. Luke ix. 26, 27. The
The present Bishop of London, indeed, speaking of the transfiguration, says, "It was a symbolical representation of Christ's coming in glory to judge the world, and of the rewards which shall then be given to the righteous." But there appears to be no ground whatever for such an assertion, either in the history itself, or in St. Peter's own account of it, in his second epistle. If we consult the history, we find it related that his face did shine as the sun, that his raiment was white as the light, that Moses and Elias appeared and conversed with him, and that a bright cloud overshadowed them; but not a word is there about Christ's coming in glory to judge the world, nor any thing at all like it."

If, from the original transaction, we turn to St. Peter's account, we shall be still more fully convinced that he has no allusion to any thing of the kind, any more than the evangelist. We have not, he says, followed cunningly devised fables when we made known to you, τὴν δυναμιν, the miraculous power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, as the Messiah, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty; for he received from God the Father, honour and glory; when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory. This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.

St. Luke particularly mentions, that the conversation turned upon the decease that he should accomplish at Jerusalem; but I know not upon what authority the Bishop says that a general resurrection and a day of retribution are represented in the transfiguration. See his Lectures, vol. ii. p. 14.
And this voice, which came from heaven, we heard when we were with him in the holy mount. St. Peter appears to have overlooked all the other circumstances attending the transfiguration, and confines himself entirely to that which was the great object of it, viz. the declaration from heaven that he was the beloved Son of God.

The learned Bishop plainly understands the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the 16th verse, of his coming to judge the world at the last day; but the whole of the apostle's reasoning compels us to understand it of his coming as the Messiah, and the subsequent part of the chapter is, in my humble opinion, a demonstrative proof that this, and this only, was his meaning, though I think it has not been accurately understood, from not attending to our Lord's having connected his coming as the Messiah with the destruction of Jerusalem. Ver. 19, We have, says the apostle, τον προφητικον λόγον, the prophetic word concerning his coming, βεβαιωτέρων, more confirmed; but how more confirmed? Why, by the signs which are now appearing of the near approach of the destruction of Jerusalem, whereunto, says the apostle, ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and that which bringeth the full blaze of light, εὐσφοτός, shall arise to illuminate your hearts, and in the fullest manner convince you that we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Knowing this first, as the foundation of our confidence in the accomplishment of his prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, that no prophecy is of private interpretation; or, rather, of private suggestion, (see the Churchman's Magazine, vol. ii. p. 12), or of human invention; for prophecy came not, παρε, formerly by the will, or at the pleasure, of men; but holy
The learned Bishop having, as I conceive, without any authority from the history of the transfiguration, or from St. Peter's account of it, introduced our Lord's resurrection and exaltation, and a future day of retribution, is much perplexed to assign a sufficient reason why the injunction of secrecy till after his resurrection should have been given. "Because," says the Bishop, "he had already foretold his resurrection to his disciples, and he also apprized them before his death of his coming in glory to judge the world. It does not therefore appear how the publication of the vision on the mount could have been attended with any other consequence than that of confirming what Jesus had already made known. But if we suppose that one purpose of the transfiguration was to typify the abolition of the ceremonial law and the establishment of the evangelical, a plain holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and consequently were entitled to the fullest credit.

The whole of this argument appears to me to be peculiarly forcible and convincing, and to harmonize most exactly with the gospel history, and particularly with our Lord's manner of connecting the full proof of his coming as the Messiah with the destruction of Jerusalem. As the days of Noah were, so shall the true nature of the coming of the Son of Man be. And as our Lord had particularly directed his disciples to watch for this awful event, the apostle very properly says, of some signs of its near approach which were then appearing, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as to a light shining in a dark place, which will soon burst out in full splendor.
reason presents itself for this command of keeping it for some time private."

But, with all due submission to the learned Bishop, is not this supposition altogether as unfounded in the history of the transfiguration as the other? Is there one word said that the transfiguration was to typify the abolition of the ceremonial law? I must confess my sagacity is not equal to the discovering any such typification, and I am sure it is not necessary, in order to afford a plain reason for our Lord's charging his disciples to tell the vision to no man till the Son of man was risen from the dead. In the preceding chapter, ver. 20, he had charged his disciples that they should tell no man that he was the Christ, or the Messiah, and the principal object of the transfiguration being to give them a divine attestation of his being the beloved Son of God, the charge was again repeated, and for the same reason; for it was not yet proper that he should publicly be declared to be the Messiah. And this, it must be observed, perfectly harmonizes with the general tenor of the gospel history, as an history of the controversy between our Lord and the Jews concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character.

The reader's attention is now requested to the 24th chapter of Matthew, as affording still clearer evidence that the gospel history is an history of this controversy. This chapter begins with our Lord's prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, and it is thus introduced. Ver. 1, And Jesus went out and
departed from the temple, and his disciples came to him to show him the buildings of the temple. When they had taken a survey of this magnificent pile of buildings, which, for art and beauty, was esteemed the wonder of the world, our Lord said to them, οὐ βλέπετε πάντα ταῦτα; See ye not all these things, or look not on all these things with excessive admiration. Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down.

The astonishment which this awful prediction produced upon the minds of the disciples, who still continued to entertain the most splendid ideas of the prosperity of their nation under the reign of their Messiah, may easily be conceived; and it is represented in a very natural and lively manner, by the questions which, upon this occasion, they immediately put to him. So contrary was this prediction to every idea which, as Jews, they had been accustomed to entertain, that they could not help exclaiming, When shall these things be? and if they must be, for that is evidently the ellipsis to be supplied, What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world, or age?

"By the end of the world," says the present Bishop of London, "is to be understood, not the final consummation of all things here below, but the end of that age, the end of the Jewish state and polity; the subversion of their city, temple, and government." See his Lectures, vol. ii. p. 139, 140. See also the Appendix to my Key, No. I.

That
That by our Lord's coming, the disciples here meant his coming, not as the judge of the world, but as the Messiah, is, I think, demonstrably evident; not only from the general tenor of the history, and from their acknowledged expectations of his coming as the Messiah, still entertained by them, but from his immediately proceeding, in so particular a manner, to caution them against false Christs and false prophets who should come in his name, or with his pretensions to the character of the Messiah, and by his again and again, in the course of the awful narrative, repeating the same caution. Ver. 4, Take heed that no man deceive you; for many shall come in my name, saying, I am O T\(\chi\phi\tau\sigma\)os, the Christ, or the Messiah, and shall deceive many. And again, ver. 23, Then, i.e. when the things he had just been describing are coming to pass, if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is O T\(\chi\phi\tau\sigma\)os, the Christ, or the Messiah, or there, believe him not; for there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and they shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive even the very elect. And that these cautions, thus again and again repeated, might make the deepest impression upon their minds, our Lord makes this very impressive and remarkable addition, ver. 25, 26, Behold I have told you before; wherefore if they, viz. the false prophets, shall say unto you, Behold he, the Messiah, is in the desert, go not forth after him; behold he is in the secret chambers, waiting for a fit opportunity of declaring
declaring himself as the Messiah, believe them not. And that they might be completely upon their guard against their deceptive arts, he still further tells them, that the nature and manner of his coming would be so conspicuous, that an attentive and discerning observer could not possibly mistake it. Ver. 27, For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the true nature and manner of the coming of the Son of Man, the Messiah, for perspicuity, be.

But, to prevent this language from being misunderstood, or applied to any other event than to the infliction of punishment on the Jews, in the destruction of Jerusalem, our Lord, in a subsequent part of the chapter, very fully explains what he meant by the phrase, the coming of the Son of Man. Ver. 37, As the days of Noah were, which unquestionably were days of great temporal vengeance, so, he says, shall also the nature of the coming of the Son of Man be. And, yet further to exemplify the nature of his coming, and to render his meaning perfect, clear, and distinct, he applies the case of Noah to that of the Jews. Ver. 38-9, For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not their danger till the flood came and took them all away; so shall also the true nature of the coming of the Son of Man be, in opposition to the manner in which the Jews expected him to come.
as a temporal prince, to raise them to the most distinguished pre-eminence as the lords of the world.

The meaning of the 27th verse being thus fully ascertained by the use of the same phrase in the 37th and 39th verses, our Lord goes on to explain, by a proverbial expression, by what means this destruction should be effected. Ver. 28, For wherefoever the carcase is, there will the eagles, the Roman army, whose standard is the eagle, be gathered together. The Bishop of London, upon this verse, says, "By the carcase is meant the Jewish nation, which was morally and judicially dead; and the instruments of divine vengeance, that is, the Roman armies, whose standards were eagles, would be collected together to devour their prey."

In the verse immediately following, the effects of this awful catastrophe are described in such strong language, as to have led many commentators to suppose that it refers entirely to the day of judgment, conceiving, to use the Bishop of London's own expression, that such very bold figures could not, with propriety, be applied to the subversion and extinction of any city or state, however great and powerful. "But the fact," the Bishop very properly observes, "is, that these very same metaphors, used in this verse, do frequently in scripture denote the destruction of nations, cities, and kingdoms. Thus Isaiah, speaking of the destruction of Babylon, says, Behold the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the
The land desolate; and he shall destroy the sinners thereof but of it: For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light; the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. (Isa. xiii. 9.) And, in almost the same terms, he describes the punishment of the Idumeans, (ch. xxxiv. 34.) and of Senacherib and his people, (ch. li. 6.) Ezekiel speaks in the same manner of Egypt, (ch. xxxii. 7, 8.) and Daniel of the slaughter of the Jews, (ch. viii. 10.) and what is still more to the point, the prophet Joel describes this very destruction of Jerusalem in terms very similar to those of Christ. (Ch. ii. 30, 31.) I will show wonders in the heavens; and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord shall come."

"It is evident then," adds the Bishop, "that the phrases here made use of, of the sun being darkened, and the moon not giving her light, and the stars falling from heaven, and the powers of heaven being shaken, are figures meant to express the fall of cities, kingdoms, and nations; and the origin of this sort of language is well illustrated by a late very learned prelate (Bishop Warburton), who tells us, that in ancient hieroglyphic writing, the sun, moon, and stars, were used to represent states and empires, kings, queens, and nobility; their eclipse or extinction denoted temporary dis-
asters, or entire overthrow, &c. So the prophets in like manner call kings and empires by the names of the heavenly luminaries. Stars falling from the firmament are employed to denote the destruction of the nobility and other great men; insomuch, that in reality the prophetic style seems to be a speaking hieroglyphics." See the 19th Lecture p. 157, 158-9.

The 30th verse appears to be a direct answer to the question of the disciples—What shall be the sign of thy coming? Then, says our Lord, shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth, or rather of the land, mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, and he shall send his angels, or rather his messengers, with the great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the one end of heaven to the other.

The prophet Daniel, from whom the expression, the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds of heaven, seems to be taken, says, ch. vii. 13, I saw

When I published my Triumphs of Christianity over Infidelity in 1802, my investigation of this part of the subject had been printed off before I had seen the Bishop's Lectures. But the reader who will refer to it, may see numerous quotations from the Old Testament illustrative of our Lord's style; and what is remarkable, this very quotation from Bishop Warburton at full length. The same view of the subject I had given so far back as the year 1787, in a pamphlet entitled, An Attempt to Illustrate various Passages of Scripture.
in the night visions, and behold one like the, or like a, Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people and nations and languages should serve him. When therefore the prophet says, that the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, he appears to me to have intended to represent the nature and manner of his coming in the execution of vengeance, agreeably to our Lord's subsequent explanation of it, viz. that it should be as in the days of Noah, when the people were engaged in all the occupations of human life, little thinking of, or expecting the flood which was about to overwhelm them. It must likewise be observed, that as clouds produce darkness, and not unfrequently storms and tempests in the natural world, which are sometimes attended with the most tremendous desolation; the expression became a very convenient, and at the same time a very significant symbol to denote great national calamities, and the ruin of states and empires.

When therefore our Lord made use of this expression, in the closest connection with his prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, and in connection too with the phrase, the coming of the Son of Man, so often used in this very chapter, what better evidence can possibly be required, that by the coming of the Son of Man in clouds, or in the clouds of heaven, was meant the nature and manner of his coming as the Messiah, and that by the destruction
of Jerusalem it would fully appear how much the Jews had been mistaken when they supposed that he was to be a temporal prince, to conduct them to conquest and to empire.

The only expression, in these verses, which seem now to require explanation, is our Lord's sending his angels to gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. "These words," the Bishop of London says, "though they seem as if they could belong to no other subject than the last day, yet most assuredly relate principally to the great object of this prophecy, the destruction of Jerusalem; after which dreadful event we are here told, that Christ will send forth his angels; that is,

* The Bishop of London, speaking of the 30th verse, says, "Those awful words then shall appear, the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then shall the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the land mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; seem applicable solely to the last advent of Christ to judge the world; and yet it is certain, that in their primary signification they refer to the manifestation of Christ's power and glory, in coming to execute judgment on the guilty Jews, by the total overthrow of their temple, their city, and their government; for so our Lord himself explains what is meant by the coming of the Son of Man, in the 27th, 28th, and 37th, verses of this chapter. And when the prophet Daniel is predicting this very appearance of Christ to punish the Jews, he describes him as coming in the clouds of heaven, and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom." See the Bishop's 19th Lecture, p. 160.
his messengers, or ministers (for so that word strictly signifies), to preach his gospel to all the world; which preaching is called, by the prophets, lifting up the voice like a trumpet; and they shall gather together his elect (that is, shall collect disciples and converts to the faith) from the four winds, from the four quarters of the earth, or, as St. Luke expresses it, from the east and from the west, and from the north and from the south."

But that it might not be possible to mistake out Lord's meaning, he appears to have taken uncommon pains to shew that he spake exclusively of what was soon to take place; for, in the 32d verse, in answer to the question of the disciples, When shall these things be? he says, Now learn a parable, or instruction, from the fig-tree: When its branch is yet tender and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh; so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, the things which he had just been describing, know that it, or, as St. Luke more fully expresses himself, that the kingdom of God is near, even at the doors.

Mr. Mede, though in general remarkable for his modesty as a writer, has been very positive that the phrase, the kingdom of God, has here a very different meaning from that commonly used in the gospel history. "I deny not," he says, but firmly believe that Christ's kingdom took place at his first coming; but I utterly deny that to be the kingdom our Saviour prophesies of Luke xxi. 31, and answerably in the other gospels." And Dr. Edwards, in his note referring to this very passage of
doors. This language, if it has any meaning in it, is strongly expressive of contiguity, and cannot, I will venture to affirm, without extreme violence, not only to the connection and occasion of the discourse, but, what is more to the purpose, to the whole tenor of the gospel history, be understood of any other event than of the very near approach of the kingdom of the Messiah, which our Lord had ori-

St. Luke, quotes Dr. Sykes as very candidly allowing, that by the kingdom of God, we are here to understand its glorious state and perfection in a future world. And what is very remarkable, Dr. Edwards has, with equal confidence with Mr. Mede, asserted that any other interpretation would indeed be utterly groundless. But upon what grounds have these learned men made these bold and confident assertions? It is not to be denied that the language of the parable very strongly expresses that this kingdom, whatever it was, was very near at hand. Nor do I think it can be denied, with any appearance of reason, that by the kingdom of God, was meant the kingdom of the Messiah declared by our Lord in his original language to be at hand; or, if any one is hardy enough to deny this, the proofs which have been adduced that the question of the disciples, What shall be the sign of thy coming? relates to the coming of the Messiah, will oblige him to retract his opinion. Besides, can it be denied, without denying the most direct and positive evidence, without contradicting the whole tenor of the gospel history, that the kingdom of God, or of the Messiah, was expected, and still continued to be expected, both by the disciples of Jesus and by the whole Jewish nation? And where could he have asserted its near approach so naturally and so properly as when he had been annihilating, by his prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, the very foundation of all their hopes of his being a temporal prince?
ginally declared to be at hand. Indeed it appears to me utterly impossible that the disciples of our Lord could have understood him in any other sense.

But, as if this minute precision was not sufficiently clear to express his full meaning, our Lord, in the following verse, goes on and says, in terms of the greatest solemnity and strength of language, ver. 34, *Verily, I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away till all these things be fulfilled.* And to give all possible weight to this assurance, he immediately adds, in the 35th verse, *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.* See also Mark xiii. 28, &c. and Luke xxi. 29; in both which evangelists the connection and the language are precisely the same.

The late Bishop Newton was so strongly impressed with the emphasis and energy of this language, that he thus forcibly expresses himself upon it. "It is to me a wonder how any man can refer part of the foregoing discourse to the destruction of Jerusalem, and part to the end of the world, or any other distant event, when it is said so positively in the conclusion, *All these things shall be fulfilled in this generation*. It seemeth as if our Saviour had been aware of some such misapplication of his words, by adding yet greater force and emphasis to

* For the meaning of the term *generation*, see my former publication, entitled, The Triumphs of Christianity over Infidelity, in the Appendix, No. II.
his affirmation, ver. 35, *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.* And yet this very prelate, with an inconsistency that is truly astonishing, says, almost immediately afterwards, that "some of these passages, particularly verses 29, 30, and 31, in a figurative sense, may be understood of the destruction of Jerusalem; but that in their literal sense, they can be meant only of the end of the world!"

With a like strength of language with Bishop Newton, Dr. Macknight has observed, that "our Lord has forbidden us to understand any part of this prophecy, primarily (why primarily?) of the destruction of the world; having connected all its parts in such a manner, that the things foretold, whatever they are, must have happened in close succession. For any interpreter to correct Christ's language here, and to say that in the 29th verse, immediately after, signifies two or three thousand years after; and that in the 34th verse, all these things, signifies only some of them, is a liberty which cannot safely be taken with his words." See Macknight in loc.

But these learned men are now no more, and if their opinion had died with them, it would have been cruelty to have taken any notice of it now that they are incapable of defending themselves; but when such a man as the present Bishop of London becomes the professed advocate for this opinion, the cause of truth demands that it should be exposed.
exposed and confuted, as highly injurious to the perspicuity of the sacred writings. If it is defensible, his abilities are amply sufficient for its support; but if not, I trust no offence can reasonably be taken that I have ventured to express my entire disapprobation of it. "Our Saviour," the Bishop says, "in the chapter before us, seems to hold out the destruction of Jerusalem, which is his principal object, as a type of the dissolution of the world, which is the under part of the representation. By thus judiciously mingling together these two important catastrophes, he gives at the same time (as he does in many other instances) a most interesting admonition to his immediate hearers, the Jews, and a most awful lesson to all his future disciples; and the benefit of his predictions, instead of being confined to one occasion, or to one people, is by this admirable management extended to every subsequent period of time, and to the whole Christian world."
It is of importance to be observed, that the learned Bishop attaches to this general remark, as he terms it, the greatest consequence; for he expressly says, it is "a sort of key to the whole prophecy, and will afford an easy solution to several difficulties that occur in it." But it is peculiarly unfortunate that so zealous an advocate for types, and double meanings, and secondary significations, should, in another part of his Lectures, have expressed his disapprobation of them in the interpretation of scripture; for he expressly says, that "it is a rule admitted and established by the best and most judicious interpreters, that in explaining the sacred writings, we ought never, without the most apparent and most indispensable necessity, allow ourselves the liberty of departing from the plain, obvious, and literal meaning of the words." But where, in the present case, is the necessity of departing from the plain, obvious, and literal meaning of the words? The learned Bishop indeed says, "the prophecy was probably intended by Jesus as a type and emblem of the dissolution of the world itself." But from whence does this probability arise? Not surely from the highly figurative is expressed clearly: and may we not expect, when God speaks to men, that his meaning should be expressed in as clear and determinate a manner." See Benson's Essay on the Unity of the Sense of Scripture, prefixed to the second volume of his Paraphrase. See also the Bishop of Landaff's Tracts, in which this Essay is introduced.
tive language of the 29th and following verses; for he says, in the most express terms, that “the fact is, that these very same metaphors do frequently in scripture denote the destruction of nations, cities, and kingdoms.”

To the Bishop's observation, “that by judiciously mingling together these two important catastrophes, the benefit of his predictions, instead of being confined to one occasion, or to one people, is by this admirable management extended to every subsequent period of time, and to the whole Christian world,” it may, I think, be fairly replied, that our Lord has peremptorily disclaimed any such management, by confining, in as strong language as can be made use of, the whole of his prediction to that generation. And what is remarkable enough, we have the Bishop's own testimony, though interlarded with the word principally, that it is so confined; for, speaking of the 35th verse, he says, “This by the way is an unanswerable proof, that every thing our Lord had been saying in the preceding part of the chapter, related principally, not to the day of judgment, or to any other very remote event, but to the destruction of Jerusalem, which did in reality happen before that generation had passed away.”

But to proceed in the examination of the remainder of the chapter under consideration. Our Lord having, as has been observed, most energetically
tically asserted, that the events which he had, in so particular a manner, been describing, would take place in that generation, goes on in the 36th verse and says, _Of that day and hour, or season when these things should happen, knoweth no man, no, not the angels, but my father only; “that is,” says the Bishop of London, “although the time when Jerusalem is to be destroyed, is, as I have told you, fixed generally to this generation, yet the precise day and hour of that event is not known to men or angels, but to God only.” And he adds, that “this verse cannot, without violence to the words, be applied to the final advent of Christ.” In the following verses, our Lord further illustrates his meaning, by an allusion to the well-known history of Noah, which is so clear as not to be mistaken. The Bishop of London, having quoted these verses, says, in his peculiarly excellent manner, “When the desolation shall come upon the city and temple of Jerusalem, the inhabitants would be as thoughtless and unconcerned, and as unprepared for it, as the antediluvians were for the flood in the days of Noah. But as some (more particularly the Christians) will be more watchful, and in a better state of mind than others, the providence of God will make a distinction between his faithful and his disobedient servants, and will protect and preserve the former, but leave the latter to be taken or destroyed by their enemies; although they may both be in the
the same situation of life, may be engaged in the same occupations, and may appear to the world to be in every respect in similar circumstances."

"Here," says the Bishop, "ends the prophetical part of our Lord's discourse; what follows is altogether exhortatory. It may be called the moral of the prophecy, and is a practical application of it, not only to his immediate hearers, but to his disciples in all future ages; for this concluding admonition most certainly alludes no less to the final judgment than to the destruction of Jerusalem, and applies with at least equal force to both."

I perfectly agree with the learned Bishop, that it may be called the moral of the prophecy, and is a practical application of it; but further than this I cannot go with him, for it appears to me demonstrable that this practical application of the moral of the prophecy relates to a watchfulness, not for the day of judgment, but for the completion of our Lord's prediction. In the former part of this prediction he had particularly directed their attention to it. Ver. 25, Behold I have told you before. And in the 42d verse, he says, Watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth some. And that the remainder of the chapter has an exclusive reference to this watchfulness for the destruction of Jerusalem, is extremely evident from the following chapter, which is an undoubted continuation of the same subject; for the conclusion of the first parable contained in it, is thus expressed: ver. 13, Watch therefore.
therefore; for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh. Let the reader compare this language with that in the 36th and 42d verses of the preceding chapter, and he will soon be convinced that it has an exclusive relation to the same subject.

Such appears to me to be the genuine meaning of the whole of the 24th of Matthew, and the parallel chapters of Mark and Luke, unincumbered by typical meanings and double senses, which not only divest them of their simplicity, and render them in a great measure unintelligible, but bring great discredit upon the Christian records*. It has, I think, been most judiciously observed by Mr. Richards in his excellent Bampton Lectures, that "the Gospel dispensation was final. It prepared not the way, nor looked forward to any other. It was not necessary therefore to have recourse to typical ceremonies or secondary senses, either in the institutions, or in the predictions delivered by its holy founder, or his inspired Apostles." Mr. Richards has added, that "consequently no traces of them will be found in the New Testament, if we except the remarkable instance of a double meaning in the prophecy of our Lord, in which he intermingles the destruction of Jerusalem with the general judg-

* I have compressed my examination of the 24th of Matthew in as small a compass as I conveniently could; but if the reader is desirous of seeing it more amply discussed, I beg leave to refer him to my late work, entitled, The Triumphs of Christianity over Infidelity, from p. 80 to 131.
ment." But how far this will be deemed an exception, the reader is now fully able to determine: for my own part, I do not hesitate to say, that I cannot consider this as an exception. In supporting this opinion I have ventured to controvert that of the Bishop of London, and I trust it will be found that I have been neither uncandid nor for a moment forgetful of the respect which is due to so distinguished a character.

I cannot however conclude my observations upon this subject without quoting, with the warmest approbation, the remark of Dr. Benson in what manner the sacred writings should be studied. "It appears to me," he says, "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 critical sense of the place."

Before I proceed in the order of St. Matthew's narration, I must beg leave to take some notice of a conversation which passed between our Lord and the Jews concerning the establishment of the kingdom of the Messiah, mentioned by St. Luke, ch. xvii, 20, &c, not only because it has an evident relation
to his controversy with them, but because it, as evidently, is parallel to the 24th of Matthew, and at the same time, contains some expressions which have very improperly, been applied to the day of judgment. The occasion of this conversation is thus stated: And when he was demanded of the Pharisees when the kingdom of God should come, he answered and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation, i.e. as Bishop Pearce has, very properly, explained it, The kingdom of the Messiah, or of Christ, is not to be of that kind that ye expect, and which has outward shew and pomp to make it observable; neither shall they say, Lo here or lo there, for behold the kingdom of God is among you, though you pretend to see none of the signs of its approach.

I have, in my Triumphs of Christianity over Infidelity, compared this chapter with the 24th.

This is one of those passages which, Mr. Mede says, relates to the kingdom of a thousand years, which the Apocalypse includes between the beginning and consummation of the great judgment. But if the meaning of the question of the Pharisees is to be determined by the known and acknowledged sentiments which they at that period unquestionably entertained concerning the nature of the Messiah's character, there cannot possibly exist a shadow of a doubt that this great man was mistaken, and that the Pharisees, when they put this question, had no notion but of the temporal establishment of the kingdom of the Messiah in their own time. The subsequent part of the chapter is of itself a sufficient proof of this.
chapter of St. Matthew, and shall not repeat anything I have there said, farther than to say, that when our Lord asserts, that the Jews would desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and should not see it, he probably meant that they would never see any such days of the Son of Man as they had figured to themselves, in the enjoyment of great national prosperity under the temporal reign of their Messiah. As a proof that this was his meaning, he says there were those who would say to them, See here or see there he is, ready to make his appearance and to assume the character of the Messiah; but, says our Lord, go not after them nor follow them; for as the lightning that lighteth out of the one part under heaven shineth unto the other part under heaven, so shall also the Son of Man be in his day; or, as St. Matthew explains it, so shall also the true nature of the coming of the Son of Man, the Messiah, for perspicuity be. In the 26th and following verses, our Lord, as in St. Matthew's narration, refers them to the case of Noah, to which St. Luke adds that of Lot; and then says, the more fully to explain his meaning, v. 30, Even thus shall it be when the true nature of the coming of the Son of Man, the Messiah, is revealed.

As the remainder of this chapter requires no explanation.

* This passage very happily explains the Apostle Peter's meaning in his 1st Epistle, Ch. i. 5: See my Triumphs of Christianity.
planation, I shall proceed immediately to the considera-
tion of the 26th chapter of St. Matthew, which con-
tains the last, the most important, and the most de-
cisive proof, that the Gospel history is an history
of the great controversy between our Lord and
the Jews concerning the true nature of the Messiah's
character. In this chapter is detailed the history
of the arraignment, trial, and condemnation of our
Lord, as a notorious malefactor and impostor, for
assuming the character of the Messiah. And as in
this case it was absolutely necessary, according to
the usual forms in judicial proceedings, to prove
the fact that our Lord had laid claim to that cha-
acter, the manner in which the Jewish rulers
conducted themselves, in order to prove this fact,
is particularly deserving of the reader's attention.
The historian, in the 59th and following verses,
tells us, that the chief priests and elders, and all the
council, fought false witness against Jesus to put him to
death, but found none; yea, though many false witness-
es came, yet found they none to establish the fact, that he
had ever, throughout his whole ministry, assumed
the character of the Messiah. How admirably is the
authenticity of the preceding history established by
this narration! And how strongly does it demon-
strate the great wisdom of our Lord's conduct, in
not publicly declaring that he was the Messiah, and
in forbidding his disciples, when he had privately
acknowledged to them that he was the Messiah, to
make
make him known under that character, and in taking, at the same time, the most effectual measures to enforce his injunction, by foretelling his own sufferings and death! In how strong a point of view likewise does it show the extreme propriety, and even the absolute necessity, of the language which he did adopt, though it has, through ignorance, been moulded into a most formidable objection to the truth and integrity of our Lord's character! For it appears, from the history of our Lord's trial, that notwithstanding the wicked artifices of the Jewish rulers, they were, at length, constrained to apply to our Lord himself, that, if possible, they might extort from him a confession that he had claimed the character of the Messiah; though most certainly in direct violation of a fundamental maxim in judicial proceedings, that a man should not be obliged to convict himself.

When the witnesses who appeared against him had delivered their evidence, such as it was, the high priest addressed our Lord, and asked him what he had to say in his defence against their accusation. V. 62. Answerest thou nothing? What is it which these witness against thee? But Jesus, according to the expressive language of the Evangelist, held his peace. The high priest then, conscious of the deficiency of the evidence which had been given against him, and finding that our Lord made no reply to his questions, said to him again,
I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, or the Messiah, the Son of God.

Although our Lord well knew the fatal consequences to himself of an acknowledgement that he was the Messiah, yet, being thus solemnly adjured as to the nature of his character, he, with a dignity suitable to that high character, replied, Thou hast said; i.e. thou hast said the truth; or, as St. Mark has it, I am. I do acknowledge that I am the Messiah, and, as a proof that I actually do sustain that character, I say unto you art: or, as St. Luke has it, αυτός εστιν, from the present time, as both these phrases literally signify, shall ye see the Son of Man, the Messiah, sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

If now there be any connection between the question of the Jewish high priest and the reply which our Lord made to it, if his meaning can be collected from the situation and circumstances of things at the time of his speaking, it could be no other than this, that though he was in the hands of his enemies, about to be degraded, reviled, and condemned as a notorious malefactor and impostor, for assuming the character of the Messiah, yet that the claim which he had now, in the most public manner, made to that character was justly founded; and as a proof that it was so, and that the Jews had totally mistaken its true nature, in supposing that he was to be a temporal prince to raise them to the most distinguished
tinguished pre-eminence as the lords of the world, they should see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

Such a declaration as this must have been a very severe and cutting one to them, as it struck at the root of all their deepest prejudices and their dearest hopes and expectations. It was as if he had said; you have been looking and longing with the utmost ardour and impatience for a person who should assume the character of your Messiah, to raise you to the highest pitch of worldly greatness, and to render you prosperous and happy beyond the example of all former times: you expect all the sensual gratifications which power or wealth can bestow; but these expectations will, most assuredly, be frustrated; for though I, who am now your prisoner and the object of your utter contempt and defamation; though I am, as one of your own prophets expressly predicted of me, despised and rejected by you, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; though, in a word, you see in me, none of the characteristic marks of the Messiah, whom you have been so anxiously expecting, and, on that account, are about to put me to a most ignominious and cruel death, as an impostor, yet you shall soon see how much you have been mistaken; you shall see the Son of Man, the Messiah, sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven.

The

- This is another of those passages which Mr. Mede and others
The effect which this solemn declaration on the part of our Lord had upon the minds of the Jewish rulers is, if anything can be, an unequivocal and decisive proof in what sense they understood it; for, as was naturally to be expected from men of their ambitious turn of mind, and with their avowed sentiments concerning the nature of the Messiah's character, upon such an occasion, their resentment was instantaneous, and their rage against him was

others have applied to the kingdom of a thousand years, or to what is called the millennium; but, without entering upon the question, whether this doctrine is well or ill founded, it may, I think, be safely affirmed, that this passage cannot have any relation to it; for the connection itself, as well as the general tenor of the Gospel history, appears to me, clearly, to demonstrate, that it has an exclusive relation to our Lord's controversy with the Jews, concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character. To guard against its application to any other event, the historian says, καὶ ἀπριλιστάσας, ἀπὸ τοῦ χρόνου, ἀπὸ τοῦ χρόνου, ἐκ τοῦ προσεποκειμένου χρόνου, ἔτος, καὶ ἀπεικόνιστε τὸν Λόγον τῆς Μαρτυρίας, ἀπὸ τοῦ χρόνου, ἀπὸ τοῦ χρόνου, ἐκ τοῦ προσεποκειμένου χρόνου, ἔτος, καὶ ἀπεικόνιστε τὸν Λόγον τῆς Μαρτυρίας, ἀπὸ τοῦ χρόνου, ἀπὸ τοῦ χρό

If then the genuine meaning of this language of our Lord be, that by the destruction of Jerusalem they should have full proof that he was the true Messiah, his declaration, in Matthew xxiv. that the Jews should see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory, will be clearly ascertained to be of the same import. Nor can there be any room for doubt, that Matt. xvi. 27, 28, relate likewise to the destruction of Jerusalem; though they have, by the Bishop of London, been applied to the day of judgment. This learned prelate has given his decided opinion that Matt. xxvi. 64, and xxiv. 30, relate to the destruction of the Jews; and no sufficient reason can, I think, be assigned why Matt. xvi. 27, 28, should not be so applied.
raised to the highest pitch of fury. Then, says the Evangelist, ver. 65, the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy! What think ye? they answered, he is guilty of a crime, which by our law is deserving of death, as a blasphemer and impostor. Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him, and others smote him with the palms of their hands, saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, thou that pretendest to be the Christ, who is he that smote thee? What greater proofs of rage and indignation, of mockery and insult, could they possibly have discovered; or how in a stronger manner have expressed the extreme grief which the very idea of the disappointment of their worldly views produced upon their minds? He hath spoken blasphemy! Away with him, crucify him, crucify him, was the universal cry. And when afterwards the question was put by Pilate, Whom will ye that I release unto you, Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ? they said, not this man, but Barabbas. And upon Pilate's expostulating with them upon their preferring a murderer, and asking them what evil Jesus had done? they all said to him, Let him be crucified! No crime, in their estimation, could equal that which deprived them of prospects so dear to their hearts, and so flattering to their pride, and which, in their stead, presented to their view, nothing but scenes of horror and desolation, misery and ruin! No wonder that, in such circumstances, they should have
have pursued him with the most unrelenting fury, and that nothing could satiate it but his blood.

At the accomplishment of a purpose so atrocious and bloody, the very heavens mourned. As if ashamed of so foul a deed, the sun withdrew its light; and, as all the three historians agree in relating, there was darkness over the whole land from the sixth to the ninth hour. The veil also of the temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent, and the graves were opened, and many bodies of saints which slept arose.

The impression which these awful and truly miraculous events made upon the minds of the spectators, is very particularly noticed in the narration of St. Luke; for, he says, that all the people that were collected together, at that spectacle, when they saw the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned. And he particularly mentions the centurion, the Roman officer, who had the charge of seeing the sentence of our Lord's crucifixion executed, as exclaiming, when he saw what had happened, Certainly this was a righteous man; or, as St. Matthew has it, Truly this was the Son of God.

These extraordinary attestations, recorded by the evangelical historians, to the excellence of our Lord's character, at the moment when he was expiring on the cross as a notorious malefactor and impostor,
impostor, for assuming the character of the Messiah, will be allowed to have a considerable weight in removing the odium of his crucifixion. But there was still wanting, in order to the complete vindication of his character, the divine interposition, to rescue him from the dominion of the grave, and to restore him again to life. This, our Lord himself had rendered absolutely and essentially necessary; for he had repeatedly, and in the most express and unequivocal terms, foretold, not only that he should suffer many things from the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, but that he should be raised again, on the third day after his crucifixion.

How awfully anxious to the disciples of our Lord must the interval between his crucifixion and his resurrection, have been? His crucifixion, they evidently considered as the death-blow to all their hopes and expectations of his being their Messiah; and, with their ideas of the nature of the Messiah's character, it could not but be so. Their language, in conversation with the supposed stranger who accompanied them to Emmaus; evidently bears the strongest marks of despondence, and of their having supposed that they had been following an impostor. We trusted, said they, that it had been he who should have redeemed Israel. Still some faint glimmering of hope appears; for they add, and besides all this, to-day is the third day since these things were done. But it was a hope in which fear and unbelief
unbelief evidently predominated; for when the women, who had been at the sepulchre, told the apostles that Jesus was risen, their words seemed to them to be idle tales. And the historian expressly says, they believed them not. They seem to have been unwilling, a second time, to have been imposed upon; and nothing but the overpowering evidence of the reality of his resurrection, appears to have overcome their incredulity.

Such were the original witnesses of our Lord's resurrection, and none, under such circumstances, seem less likely to have been imposed upon. Yet all united, in the face of the whole world, in the face of dangers tenfold more formidable than any they had yet experienced, in declaring before the Jewish rulers who had crucified him, and in the very city where he had been crucified, and that within a few days after the event had taken place, that that same Jesus whom they had put to death, was risen from the dead, and that they were all witnesses of the fact; and that by that astonishing event, God had evinced, beyond all contradiction, that he was no impostor, but the true Messiah, whom they had all so anxiously expected! Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

See Acts ii. 22, 23. 32. 36. Again, when the apostles were miraculously delivered from the prison into which they had been thrown, for preaching in the name of Jesus, and the high priest asked them, saying,
saying, Did we not straitly command, that you should not teach in this name, and behold you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us; nothing can exceed the bold and manly reply of the apostles: We ought to obey God rather than man. So, again, when the Jewish rulers

A similar language is used by Socrates, which, though well known to the learned, will probably not be unacceptable to readers in general. I shall present it to them as translated by the ingenious author of a Dissertation upon the Conduct of the Jewish Sanhedrim, together with his remarks upon it.

"Should you, to the charge exhibited against me, reply, Socrates, we pay no regard to what Anytus has advanced, we acquit you; but upon this express condition, that you are never again to be employed in this manner, nor to teach any more: if you do, you shall be put to death. Were you, as I said, to offer me pardon upon these terms, my answer should be, O Athenians, I highly esteem and regard you, but I will rather obey God than you: and as long as I live, and my strength remains, I will not cease to teach and instruct such of you as I shall have occasion to meet in my usual way. This office I will perform to young and old, to countrymen and strangers; but, in a particular manner to you, my countrymen, with whom I am more nearly connected. For, be assured, this is the command of God; and I am persuaded you enjoy not a greater privilege in the state, than this service which I perform for God."

The learned translator upon this passage observes, that it has "often, and very justly, been admired as one of the finest of antiquity." It breathes sentiments truly excellent, a spirit of true heroism in his noble contempt of death; of patriotism in his affection for his countrymen; and of piety in the sacred regard he shews for God. Now, let the character and situation
rulers again commanded them not to speak at all, nor speak in the name of Jesus, it seems absolutely impossible not to admire the noble and intrepid firmness which they displayed; Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken to you more than to God, judge ye; for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. In the former instance, the apostle Peter immediately proceeds to charge the Jewish rulers with the murder of their Lord, to assert his resurrection from the dead, and to state with precision what was the great design of the Messiah's mission. Acts v. 30. The God of our fathers hath raised up his Son Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree: Him hath God exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, not, as you expect, to rescue you from the yoke of the Romans, and to raise you to great worldly prosperity, but to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Spirit, which God hath given to them that obey him.

When
When the Jewish rulers had heard that, and no hopes were held out to them of his being a mighty conqueror, to promote the objects of their worldly ambition, the evangelical historian relates, that they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them. But they were over-ruled by the sage advice of Gamaliel. 

Refrain, says he, from these men, and let them alone; for, if this counsel, or this work be of men, it will come to nought, but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply, by pursuing violent measures, ye be found to fight against God: and to him they agreed. And, when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they again commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And, notwithstanding the injunction, accompanied with the stripes which they had received, they ceased not to teach and to preach Jesus, του Χριστον, the Messiah.

From these instances, to which many more, collected from the history of the Acts of the Apostles, might be added, it appears unquestionable that the apostles were fully convinced, not only that Jesus was the Messiah, but that they were now, for the first time, divested of their prejudices, and completely understood the nature and design of the Messiah's character and office. They now no longer expected him to assume the character of a temporal prince, which, till after his resurrection, was the chief
chief object of their ambition, as appears from the question which they put to him, subsequent to that event. Acts i. 6. Lord wilt thou, at this time, restore the kingdom to Israel?

This, however, was by no means the case with respect to the great body of the Jewish nation. They, on the contrary, continued with unceasing anxiety to look for a person who should rescue them from the yoke of the Romans, and raise them to the distinguished pre-eminence of being the lords of the world. But, in the course of our Lord's ministry, he frequently hinted, that the coming of the Messiah would, with regard to them, have a very different issue. And, towards the close of his life, he predicted, with unexampled clearness and precision, that the coming of the Messiah would, to them, be in clouds, and as in the days of Noah. The Son of Man shall come in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. As the days of Noah were, which were days of great temporal calamity, so shall the nature of the coming of the Son of Man be. And the perspicuity of the true nature of his coming, as the Messiah, in opposition to the manner in which the Jewish nation expected him to come, is thus described. As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the true nature of the coming of the Son of Man for perspicuity be. Nor is there any one subject, throughout the whole gospel history, upon which our Lord expatiates, so largely, as on this; none on which he so decidedly
decidedly rests the issue of his controversy with his
countrymen, as to the true nature of his character.
So that his language, upon this subject, imports
nothing less than this, If Jerusalem be not, in this
generation, destroyed, then the Lord hath not spoken
by me!

The signs of this truly awful and important event
were pointed out by our Lord with the greatest
particularity and exactness, for this express purpose,
that his disciples might watch for it, to avoid being
involved in the destruction that was approaching,
and that they might be enabled to support the faith
of their followers against the insinuations of their
adversaries, who might tauntingly say, as St. Peter
and Josephus inform us, they actually did say,
Where is the promise of his coming; for since the fa-
thers fell asleep, all things continue as they were, from
the beginning of the creation.

Upon the supposition of the truth of the gospel
history, it is utterly impossible to imagine the
apostles should have been inattentive to their di-
vine Master's prediction of this awful event, and to
the signs of its near approach; more especially after
they became acquainted with the true nature of his
character. But, in adverting to this event, it must
be obvious to everyone, that the utmost caution
and circumspection were requisite, lest by express-
ing themselves too plainly, they might materially
injure the cause in which they were engaged, and
enhance the sufferings to which they were already
exposed.
exposed. This was a conduct which our Lord had himself particularly pointed out to them, in his direction, to be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

To answer these important purposes, we find the apostles, in their epistles, adopting, as was extremely natural for them, as Jews and as pious and good men, the language which was in familiar use in the writings of the prophets, in describing the near approach of great temporal calamities: such as, that the Lord is at hand; the coming of the Lord draweth nigh; the day of the Lord is coming; and more especially the phrase, the coming of Christ, so aptly pointed out to them in our Lord's own language, in describing the destruction of Jerusalem.

The following are a few examples of the language of the prophets, in describing the near approach of temporal calamities. The prophet Isaiah, when speaking of the near approach of the destruction of Babylon, says, chap. vi. 9, Howl ye, for the day of the Lord is at hand. It shall come as a destruction from the Almighty. Behold, the day of the Lord cometh to lay the land desolate. Joel i. 15, Alas, for the day, for the day of the Lord is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty, it shall come. Zeph. i. 7, Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord God; for the day of the Lord is at hand; for the Lord hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests. Ezek. xxx. 2, 3, Son of Man, prophesy and say, Thus saith the Lord God, Howl ye, we worth
worth the day, for the Lord is near, even the day of the Lord is near, a cloudy day. And, most remarkable is the expression of the prophet Amos, chap. v. 18, particularly if compared with our Lord's description, Luke xvii. 22; Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord. To what end is it for you to desire it? The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light.

With these examples in view, let us attend to the language of St. Paul, in the vth chapter of his first Epistle to the Thessalonians. Yourselves know perfectly, that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night; for when they, i.e. as I suppose the apostle to mean, the unbelieving Jews, shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them as upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape. With what peculiar propriety does the apostle add, in the following verse, of those who were acquainted with our Lord's prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem: Ye brethren are not in darkness, that that day, the day of the Lord, should overtake you as a thief! Ye are all the children of light and of the day, seeing that ye know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. We are not of the night, nor of darkness. And it is with equal propriety that he founds upon it his subsequent exhortation, ver. 6, Therefore let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober.

I think it is impossible not to see the striking coincidence and harmony between this language...
and that of our Lord, when he says, Matt. xxiv. 38, 39. As in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be: Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. All the commentators upon St. Paul's language have noticed this resemblance, and referred to these very passages. And nothing, I think, but a misconception of the meaning of our Lord's prediction, and the unjustifiable introduction of types and double meanings, could have thrown a veil over the genuine meaning of the apostle in the chapter under consideration. It is so plain, that he who runs may read and understand it.

I am well aware that the phrase, the times and the seasons, in the first verse of this chapter, has been applied by many commentators to "the time of the duration of the world, and the particular season at which Christ shall come to judge mankind." But there seems to have been no reason for the use of an ambiguous phrase in describing the day of judgment, but an obvious one, as has already been observed, if it related to the destruction of Jerusalem!

The true meaning of this phrase seems to have been very accurately stated by the late Bishop Pearce. For upon the disciples asking our Lord,
Wilt thou, at this restore the kingdom to Israel? His comment is—Wilt thou take the Jews from under the Roman yoke, and give to them a king and kingdom of their own? He gives them no direct answer to their question; but his words seem to imply, that when the Holy Ghost was come upon them, they should then know the nature of his kingdom. And it is remarkable, that when Dr. Benson and Dr. Macknight, have no other object in view, than to ascertain the genuine meaning of the phrase, they give it with sufficient accuracy.

With respect to the second chapter of the second Epistle to the Thessalonians; it has, I think, been universally allowed to have an immediate relation to the same subject. And indeed there are unquestionable proofs of the fact; for the coming of Christ is evidently, upon every supposition, synonymous with the coming of the Lord, in the former chapter. In that chapter too, he says, Ye have no need that I write unto you. In this, he asks them if they did not remember, that when he was yet with them (previous to his writing his first Epistle), he told them of these things?

There are, I think, besides, some very striking and unanswerable proofs, that the coming of Christ, in the first verse of this chapter, relates, not to the end of the world, but to the destruction of Jerusalem. Among these,

these, the chief, perhaps, is, the exact correspondence of the apostle’s language, with that of our Lord, in his prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem; as may be seen by viewing them together.

Matt. xxiv. 3.
What shall be the sign of thy coming?

V. 6.
See that ye be not troubled.

Mark xiii. 7.
Be ye not troubled.

Take heed that ye be not deceived.

Matt. xxiv. 31.
And they shall gather together his elect.

The Greek, both in the Epistle and Gospels, is as follows:

Matt: xxiv. 3.
τι το σήμερον τῆς σῆς παρουσίας;

2 Thess. ii. 1, 2, 3.
Now we beseech you concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

V. 2.
Be not soon shaken in mind or be troubled.

Mark xiii. 5.
Take heed lest any man deceive you.

Take heed that ye be not deceived.

2 Thess. ii. 1.
Let no man deceive you by any means.

2 Thess. ii. 3.
Now concerning our gathering together unto him.
Allowing for the different situations of our Lord and his apostles, and for the different ways which different writers will naturally have in speaking upon the same subject, these coincidences are sufficiently striking to induce an attentive observer to think there is, at least, a very strong presumption that the apostle, in his description of the coming of Christ, had an immediate and direct reference to our Lord’s prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, and consequently that the reasoning which has been adopted in endeavouring to ascertain the genuine meaning of the fifth chapter of his former epistle, is strongly corroborated by it; for, as has been observed, it has been generally admitted that both chapters relate to the same subject.

It is not my intention in this work, to enter into a critical examination of the whole of this celebrated chapter;
chapter; but it would be doing great injustice to my argument, not to trace out the leading ideas contained in it, particularly as they appear to me to harmonize, in an uncommon degree, with the general tenor of the gospel history. When, for instance, the apostle says, v. 3, *That day—the day of Christ, or the day of the Lord—shall not come except Aποστασία—the apostacy, shall come first*, he seems to me, most decidedly, to allude to the rebellion of the Jews against the Romans, which was the grand preparatory step to the destruction predicted by our Lord; for, in this prediction, he says, Matt. xxiv. 6, 7, *ye shall bear of wars and rumours of wars; for nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom;* which is precisely the original meaning of the term Aποστασία, apostacy, made use of by the apostle.

Mr. Mede, Bishop Newton, Bishop Halifax, Dr. Benson, Dr. Macknight, and Mr. Zouch, and, in general, all the advocates for the application of the contents of this chapter, to the apostacy of the church of Rome, are decidedly of opinion that the apostacy here mentioned was not of a civil, but of a religious nature, not a revolt from government, but a defection from the true religion and worship of God. But though they have endeavoured

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4 This has already been done at large in my *Triumphs of Christianity over Infidelity*, from page 191 to 226; and a very able writer, in a correspondence with the author, has very candidly acknowledged he can discern no flaw in the reasoning there adopted.
to prove, by an appeal to those passages of scripture, where the term *apostacy* is made use of, that this was St. Paul's meaning, yet, I trust I shall be excused, if I say that none of them all appear to me to have given that critical and minute attention to the genuine meaning of the word, as used by the sacred writers, to warrant an implicit acquiescence in their opinion.

The term *Apostasia*, *apostacy*, when considered in the abstract and without relation to any particular subject, most unquestionably means a departure from any thing. And there needs no better evidence that this is the genuine meaning of the word, than that the sacred writers, particularly those of the New Testament, always use it in this sense. Thus St. Luke says, Acts xxii. 21, that St. Paul taught *Apostasia*, *apostacy*—but to render the writer's meaning perfectly clear, some addition was necessary, and therefore it is added, that it was an apostacy from Moses. *Apostasia* did in the times of the former times shall depart; but, to render it clear what he meant, he adds, that they should depart from the faith. Once more, the writer to the Hebrews, says, ch. iii. 12, *Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing;* but, to make himself fully understood, he adds, that they were not to depart from the living God.

The term *Apostasia*, *apostacy*, in the chapter under con-
consideration, has no addition annexed to it, and
must therefore be determined by the subject to
which it is related, and that, it cannot be denied,
is the coming of Christ. Whether that coming re-
lates to the day of judgment, or to the destruction of
Jerusalem, is the matter in dispute*. I have already
produced no slight evidence, that it is the latter of
these events; and I am persuaded that that evidence
will increase, as we proceed in our examination of
the subsequent part of the chapter.

A careful attention to the same sources of in-
formation to which an appeal has hitherto been
made, will, if I am not very much mistaken, shew
that the appellations of the man of sin and the son

* It is not unworthy of the reader's notice, that Josephus, in
his history of the Jewish War, which ended in the destruction
of Jerusalem, constantly uses the term ἀποστασία, apostacy, to
denote the rebellion of the Jews against the Romans.

With respect to the sentiments of the early fathers of the
Christian church, I shall not trouble myself nor my readers
with any remarks upon them, farther than to observe, that Mr.
Leigh, in his Critica Sacra, in a note upon the word ἀποστα-
σία, apostacy, says, "some interpret it, de defectione ab Im-
perio Romano, as Ambrose, Hierom, Tertullian, of a revolt
from the Roman government. Others, and more, interpret it,
de defectione à fide, Chryso!t. Æcum. Theoph. Theodoret
and August. de Civit. Dei of an apostacy from the faith. And
Mr. Hardy, in his note on 2 Thess. ii. 3. says—Ἀποστασία à
fide defectionem generaliter denotat—the word apostacy, de-
notes a departure from the faith. But he observes—Hic de-
fecitionem Judeorum ab imperio Romano significare videtur.
Here it seems to signify, the revolt of the Jews from the Ro-
man government.
of perdition, were meant of the Jewish nation, and that in fact, he had in his eye, an exclusive regard to them. In the xxiii. of Matthew, our Lord describes, with great particularity and minuteness, the character of the rulers of that nation, charging them with crimes of the deepest die, most probably, with a view to prepare the minds of his disciples for the awful fate that awaited them; and towards the close of this chapter, he has this remarkable expression, v. 32, Fill ye up, or rather, in the form of a prediction, πληρωσήτε, ye will fill up the measure of your fathers; i.e. as the context seems plainly to imply, of the iniquities of your fathers. And then, as our Lord tells them, their house would be left unto them desolate.

It is remarkable that the apostle Paul, in his Ist Ep. ch. ii. 15, 16, says, the Jews, by their flagitious conduct in killing the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and their forbidding them to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, were proceeding, εἰς το ἀναπληρώσατε, completely to fill up the measure of their iniquities, as a vessel or measure is filled up, till it can hold no more; and that, in consequence of their extreme wickedness, wrath was coming upon them, εἰς τέλος, to the uttermost, or to their utter extinction, as a nation.

The learned Dr. Beattie, speaking of the extreme flagitiousness of the character of the Jews, as a nation, says, "The virtue of the Roman people was not, in those days, exemplary. Yet when
when we compare their manners, as they occasionally appear in the sacred history, with those of the Jews, how are we struck with the difference! The Romans are indeed Pagans; but they are not destitute of that good nature and love of justice which one expects to find in a civilized nation. The Jews are seldom seen in any other character than that of bloody barbarians. Pontius Pilate avowed our Lord's innocence, and shewed an inclination to save his life; Gallio, proconsul of Achaia, acted with good sense and moderation when Paul was brought before him; Claudius Lysias, Festus, and Felix, in their treatment of the same apostle, were not unmercifully severe; and the centurion, whose prisoner he was, in his voyage to Italy, was very much attached to him. But the Jewish priests, scribes, and elders, conspired to murder our Saviour without a trial; suborned persons to bear false witness against him; and the same assembly, or their successors in office, connived at a scheme, and of course concurred in it, for the assassination of Paul. In a word, it appears that the greater part of what we call the better sort of the Jews of that age, when they had resolved upon any measure, would not hesitate to employ any means, however unjust, cruel, or shameful, in the accomplishment of it.  

Nor doth the extreme depravity of the Jews, as

See Beattie's Evidences, p. 140, &c. vol. i.
a nation, appear from the Christian records only; for Josephus, who had ample means of knowing them well, in the fullest manner confirms what is there said of them. "To give a particular account of all their iniquities were endless. Thus much, in general, it may suffice to say, that there never was a city which suffered such miseries, nor a race of men, from the beginning of the world, which so abounded in wickedness. I verily believe, that if the Romans had delayed to destroy these wicked wretches, the city would either have been swallowed up by the earth, or overwhelmed by the water, or struck with fire from heaven, as another Sodom; for it produced a far more impious generation than those who suffered such punishments."

The apostle Paul, who certainly was no stranger to the character of the Jews, as a nation, and who appears, from what he has said of them in his former epistle, ch. ii. 15, 16, to have been deeply impressed with a sense of their unparalleled atrocities, has personified them, and, without particularly mentioning them by name, has represented them as a man of sin—as one whose whole composition was sin and nothing else. And it has this singular advantage of conveying, in a single sentence, all that could have been said in the most masterly description. And as sin and punishment are very naturally connected together, especially when arrived at such an enormous height, the apostle carries
carries on the personification, under the relative idea of a son of perdition—of one devoted to destruction and the natural offspring of such a parent.

But how, it will be said, is the apostle's subsequent language to be applied to the Jews as a nation? What evidence is there, from the history of those times, either sacred or profane, that this man of sin, this son of perdition, exalted himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he, as a God, sat in the temple of God, showing himself that he was God?

It will be necessary, in answer to these questions, to ascertain what is the precise meaning of the former part of this description. And I shall not be suspected of being too partial to my own opinion if I state those of Dr. Benson and Bishop Halifax, the professed advocates of its application to the church of Rome.

The former says, "Princes and magistrates are, in scripture, sometimes called Gods. See Psalm Ixxii. 1. 6. 7. cxxxix. 1, &c. And he farther says, "it is well-known, that in the apostle's days Caesar was the Greek name, or title of the Roman emperor. See Acts xxv. 21. 25. If therefore we understand Caesar of the imperial dignity, then the apostle rises in his discourse and prophesies that the man of sin would exalt himself, not only above every one that is called a God, or temporal potentate, but even above the majesty and dignity of Caesar, the Roman emperor himself, the highest
highest of earthly gods. Accordingly it is in the singular number Θεός, and not Θεοί. The apostle has not spoken out so plainly as to say Θεός; but, as he hath connected Θεός with every one that is called a god, he hath directed us how to understand him, and spoken as plainly as it was then proper for him to do."

Bishop Halifax, in his sermon on the Man of Sin, p. 143, says, that "by opposing and exalting himself above all that is called a God, or that is worshipped, may be only meant, that the man of sin should exercise a super-eminent jurisdiction over the kings and princes of this world."

In the early part of this work, it was shewn, that it was a peculiar and distinguishing feature in the national character of the Jews, that in looking for the coming of their Messiah, they one and all expected him to appear as a temporal prince, to raise them as a nation to universal empire. Their expectation that their Messiah would conduct them to this universal empire, appears to me therefore to be what the apostle terms, the man of sin exalting himself above all that is called a God, or that is worshipped, above the imperial majesty and dignity of Cæsar himself, the highest of earthly gods. To obtain this fancied empire, they rejected our Lord, rebelled against the Romans, and lent a willing ear to any one who afforded them the most distant prospect of success.

To this interpretation, I am aware, it may be objected, that though the Jews grasped at this universal
versal empire, they never did attain to it, and that therefore they could not have been the objects intended by St. Paul. But to this it may, I think, very fairly be replied, that the apostle's language does not amount to a declaration that the man of sin had actually attained to that universal empire, but was only endeavouring to obtain it. The exact literal sense of the original οὐ αὐτοκράρον οὐ κρατοῦσαν ἀληθῶς is, 
who is opposing and exalting himself; which evidently implies, that he had not, in reality, accomplished his ambitious purpose. And, it is not a little remarkable, that that able scholar and judicious divine, Dr. Jortin, when referring to this very passage, says, that verbs active sometimes signify a design and endeavour to perform a thing, whether accomplished or not. That the other part of the apostle's language—the sitting in the temple of God and showing himself as a God, is descriptive of an ecclesiastical tyranny, is unquestionable; and that the Jews, as a nation, came under this description is, I think, equally so. While our Lord was upon earth, he told them to their faces, that they shut up the kingdom of heaven against men, and that they would neither go in themselves nor suffer others, who were entering, to go in. It was the same tyrannical spirit which led them with such relentless fury to persecute our Lord himself, and at length to accomplish their diabolical and inhuman purpose of putting him to a most cruel and ignominious
Ignominious death, after having subjected him to the most wanton and barbarous insults and the most degrading and afflicting contumely and reproach that ever disgraced a court of judicature.

With respect to their treatment of his disciples, we are told, that after his removal they continued their persecutions with a similar fury, beating some and killing some, hunting them about from city to city, and commanding them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. And the whole history of the Acts of the Apostles is an irrefragable proof that this characteristic feature of the man of sin, sitting in the temple of God and shewing himself as a God, belonged to none, with more propriety, than to the Jewish nation; particularly as their ecclesiastical tyranny was literally carried on, in the very temple of God! But I cannot say so much to the purpose or so much to my own and the reader's satisfaction upon this subject, as has been already said by the learned Dr. Whitby. "When," says he, "the apostles began to preach the word of life, the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the sadducees, Acts iv. 1, and the whole order of the priesthood, v. 6, styled to σωτηρία, the sanhedrin, v. 15, commanded them not to speak nor teach in the name of Jesus, v. 18; on which account these rulers are said to be assembled against the Lord and against his Christ, v. 26. And the answer of the apostles to them is, that God was rather to be obeyed than man. After this the high priest and all his associates place
the apostles in the sanhedrin, Acts, v. 17, 27, calling them to an account for disobeying their commands; and having received this answer from the apostles, that God must be obeyed rather than man, they beat them in the sanhedrin, and again command them not to speak in the name of Jesus, ver. 40, 41. Soon after we find Stephen brought before the scribes and elders into the sanhedrin, chap. vi. 12, and the high priest, ch. vii. 1, and they who sat in the sanhedrin, having examined him, and the witnesses against him, they stoned Stephen, v. 59; which death could only be inflicted on him by the sanhedrin. After this, Saul receives letters from the high priest, ch. ix. 1, and from all the elders, ch. xxii. 5, to bind all Christians he could find in any of their synagogues and bring them to Jerusalem, Acts ix. 2, 14. Yea, in the second, or as Bishop Pearson saith, in the fourth year of Nero, the high priest and the whole sanhedrin meet, Acts xxi. 30, and Paul is brought before them, ch. xxiii. 1. Yea, when the war was begun, affairs seem still to be ordered by the high priest and sanhedrin; for it was after the flight of Cestius Gallus from Jerusalem that Josephus was made governor of Galilee, and thence he writes to the sanhedrin of Jerusalem for instruction."

This learned writer further observes, that only the Jewish sanhedrin, their priests, high priests, and doctors, or expounders of the law, sat in the temple
temple of God, then properly so called; and there
the high priest and the sanhedrim took upon them
the power of judging in capital causes. Thus
they stoned Stephen: thus also they stoned James
the brother of our Lord and others with him; and
St. Paul persecuted the Christians even to
death by their authority, Acts xxii. 4, 5, and thus
they sat in the temple of God.

Dr. Benson was too well acquainted with the gospel his-
tory, not to perceive that this part of St. Paul's description
was strictly applicable to the Jews, and accordingly he readily
allows that the Scribes and Pharisees actually did arrogate to
themselves a divine authority, and therefore might be said to
sit in the temple of God. But, he says, the apostle could not
foretell that as a future event. They did so already, and for
some time they had done so. And he mentions Dr. Whitby
as alledging that the apostle does not foretell what would be,
but speaks of what was already, as to that particular, the
man of sin's sitting in the temple of God. But, says Dr. Ben-
son, the series of the prophecy will not bear that interpreta-
tion; for though he sometimes speaks in the present, he is
all along to be understood in the future tense, as we find the
apostles and prophets often using the present for the future in
their predictions.

I am not inclined to controvert the truth of the observation,
that the present is often used for the future in the language
of prophecy, but this, I think, is not an instance of the
kind. On the contrary, the apostle appears to me to have
distinguished with great accuracy and precision, what was yet
future, from what had already taken place. Of the apostasy
which was to precede the coming of Christ, he most unquestion-
ably speaks as being yet future. Of the ruins—

or
St. Paul's subsequent description, that the Lord should destroy this man of sin, &c. with the spirit or breath of his mouth, if the phrase the coming of the Lord be admitted to be a proper language to point out the near approach of a great temporal calamity, is of easy solution. And the phrase, the brightness of his coming, appears to have a singular propriety in it, when it is compared with our Lord's language in the xxivth of Matthew, v. 27. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. As the destruction of Jerusalem was the closing evidence of the controversy between our Lord and the Jews concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character, the phrase, the brightness of his coming, seems peculiarly adapted to express the ultimate issue of that controversy! The Jews would not admit any one to be the true Messiah who did not profess to raise them to great temporal prosperity. Our Lord told them, as the last and most decisive proof, that they had totally mis-

or disobedient one, he speaks as yet to be revealed; but, as has already been observed, he speaks of the man of sin as then actually opposing and exalting himself above all that is called a God, or that is worshipped, and as sitting in the temple of God; for the verbs, in the original, as well as in the translation, are all in the present tense. It seems therefore, in this instance, to be an unwarrantable assertion, that the apostle is all along to be understood in the future tense, and an unjustifiable liberty taken with his language.
taken the true nature of the Messiah's character, that Jerusalem should, in that generation, be destroyed, and therefore the apostle very properly says, that event would be a bright and splendid evidence of their erroneous ideas upon the subject.

The coming of the false Messiahs, after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish, in the 9th and 10th verses, cannot, I think, but bring to the reader's recollection, our Lord's language, when describing the signs of the approaching destruction of Jerusalem. It is, indeed, so striking, that all the commentators have taken notice of it; and Mr. Kett, in particular, having quoted our Lord's words, "There shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect," says, these words clearly relate, not only to the prognostics, but to circumstances which happened during the siege." And in his note on our Lord's language, he says, "Josephus makes use of the exact words, signs and wonders, σημεῖα καὶ τερατα, when speaking of the false prophets foretold by our Saviour." 

Such are the accumulated evidences that this chapter relates, exclusively, to our Lord's prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem; and it appears

1 See Kett's History, the Interpreter of Prophecy, vol. i. p. 290-1. 3d Edit.
to me to constitute a most admirable proof, not only of the harmony that subsists between St. Paul's language and that of the gospel history, but of the general authenticity of the whole.

I cannot but add, that it appears to me that the peculiar interest which the Thessalonians are represented to have had in the matter, and the earnestness with which he presses it upon them, give a considerable weight to these evidences. Now we beseech you concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Remember ye not that I told you of these things? Stand fast and hold the traditions which ye have been taught.

That in the moment of passion and the warmth of controversy, naturally arising from the reformation from the errors of popery, this chapter should have been applied to the church of Rome, can create no surprise; for ecclesiastical tyranny, or indeed any tyranny, when suffered to grow to any great extent, is extremely similar. But that men of great learning and abilities—men who have dedicated a large portion of their time to the study of this subject, in the calm retreats of their closets, and in unclouded seasons of prosperity, should have so applied it, is scarcely to be accounted for, but from their not having attended to the gospel history as an history of the controversy between our Lord and the Jews concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character.

With respect to the antichrist of St. John, it appears
appears to me, to be equally improper to apply it to the apostacy of the church of Rome. In the controversy among the learned, concerning the time when St. John’s epistles were written, they seem to me very properly to rest the evidence of its being written before the destruction of Jerusalem, upon the language which he has adopted concerning antichrist. Mr. Pyle, in his preface to this epistle, says—"his mentioning the last hour, i.e. Christianity abolishing the Jewish dispensation, along with the antichrists and false prophets that our Saviour foretold would be the forerunners of the destruction of that nation, seem most strongly to intimate the time of writing this epistle to have been before the destruction of Jerusalem.

Archbishop Newcome has observed, that Grotius’s note upon 1 John ii. 18, is well worth considering. Ultima hora, i.e. ultimum tempus, ubi ad Judæos sermo est, significat tempus proximum excidio urbis ac templi et reipublicæ Judæorum." And the archbishop, with great propriety and good sense, adds, "and the words, whereby we know that it is the last time, have much force, if we suppose that they refer to our Lord’s prophecies, viz. of the destruction of Jerusalem.""

To these testimonies I beg leave to add that of the present Bishop of Lincoln. Speaking of the date of this epistle, he says—"some have supposed

1 See Archbishop Newcome’s Observations, p. 192.
that it was written before and others after the destruction of Jerusalem. In the following passage, it is the last time, and as we have heard that antichrist shall come, even now there are many antichrists, whereby we know it is the last time, the apostle seems to allude to the approaching dissolution of the Jewish state, and to Christ's predictions concerning the false teachers who were to appear before the destruction of Jerusalem."

Bishop Hurd says, "It is easy to give a just exposition of the text, Little children, it is the last time, or hour; that is, the destruction of Jerusalem is at hand, as indeed it followed very soon after the date of this epistle." Again, he says, that "the appearance of false Christs and false prophets (of which there were many, according to our Lord's prediction, in St. John's time) indicated the arrival of that hour that was to be fatal to the Jewish state."

The learned bishop adds, but, as appears to me, without any authority from St. John, that "they were at the same time, the types and forerunners of a still more dreadful power, which should be revealed in the latter times, in a future period, when that calamity was past."

As the learned prelate has professed, expressly, to examine the prophecies by the light of sober criticism and authentic history, because he says: "it is no new or difficult thing to misrepresent facts,

and to misinterpret scripture; to pervert, in short, these two instruments of truth to any ends, which prejudice hath in view,” p. 4, 5, he should himself have been particularly cautious of making assertions without proof, and still more so, not to have deviated from his own accurate description of the apostle’s genuine meaning. But, alas, how widely does he stray from it? And how little ground is there for his assertion, that such a power should arise in the Christian church; or that St. John appeals to a tradition to that purpose which was then current among the disciples?¹ The apostle does, indeed say, that those to whom he wrote had heard that antichrist should come; but this tradition appears evidently to relate to our Lord’s prediction of the coming of false Christs, and the apostle says, that there then were many antichrists, whereby they knew that it was the last time. But not one word does he say about the rising of any power in the Christian church, in a future period, when that calamity was past: nor does he give the slightest hint that they were the types and forerunners of such a power, which should be fully revealed in the latter times, nor is the hated name of antichrist applied by the apostle, by way of anticipation to the false prophets of that time, as possessing much of his character and acting with his spirit. All this appears to me to be totally with-
out foundation in St. John's epistles. And yet by much the greater part of this learned prelate's celebrated lectures, is built entirely upon this foundation.

The learned Dr. Benson, speaking upon this subject, says, "that the apostle John, in using this term *antichrist*, had no reference to the church of Rome. I am (he says) well persuaded that the church of Rome, and the Pope, as the head thereof, is an enemy to Christ, and, as such, prophesied of, 2 Thess. ii. 1, where he is described as *the man of sin*, and he whose coming is after the working of Satan; and by this apostle, Rev. xvii. in characters no less evident: though I cannot find that, in scripture, he is any where expressly called by the name of *antichrist*; and in this place, (ch. ii. 22,) St. John does not seem to have been prophesying of that corrupt church; but describing *the false teachers* who were then sprung up in the church."

Mr. Faber, speaking of Mr. Whitaker, says, "he appears to me to have exceeded his commission in branding the papacy with the title of antichrist. Many indeed, and wonderfully explicit are the prophecies which describe the detestable cruelties and unholy superstitions of that great apostacy; which teach us the precise duration of its persecuting tyranny, which foretel its union with rebellious infidelity, which point out both the place and manner of its destruction. But I have not yet been

* See Benson in loc.
able to discover upon what scriptural grounds the name of antichrist hath been so generally applied to it. St. John is the only inspired writer who uses the term, and nothing that he says, relative to it, affords us any warrant for conferring it upon the papacy. He is antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son. The church of Rome never denied either the Father or the Son; therefore the church of Rome cannot be the antichrist intended by St. John. As for the identity of the little horn of the Roman beast, it seems to me to have been rather taken for granted than proved."

But let us attend to what St. John has himself said upon the subject, and it will, I think, appear, that the apostle's language, when speaking of antichrist, in ch. ii. 18, has a particular reference to the great controversy between our Lord and the Jews, concerning his being the Messiah. Thus, v. 22, he says—Who is a liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ— or the Messiah? He is the antichrist, who denieth the Father and the Son; for, adds the apostle in the following verse—Whoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father founded upon the principle which our Lord himself had laid down, Matt. x. 40. He that receiveth you, receiveth me. Let that, therefore, concludes the apostle, abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning, concerning the Messiah. And, in the 26th verse, he uses a language which

n See Faber on the Prophecies.
has so striking a resemblance to that of our Lord, that it can hardly be doubted, that it had a particular reference to it. *These things have I written unto you, concerning them that would seduce you,* says St. John. *False Christs and false prophets,* says the Evangelist, *shall rise, to seduce, if it were possible, the very elect.* And, to shew what was the object of those who were endeavouring to seduce them, the apostle, in the 28th verse, says, *and now little children abide in him,* i.e. in Christ, in opposition to the antichrift, or the *many antichrists,* mentioned in the 18th verse, *να οταν θηρειμων—not, as in our translation, when he shall appear; but when he shall be fully manifested as such, we may have confidence in him, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.*

In the ivth chapter, the apostle again resumes the same subject, and expresseth himself in such a particular and unequivocal manner as to render it impossible for any one who gives attention to the gospels as histories of the controversy concerning *the true nature of our Lord's character,* to misunderstand him. **Ver. 1, Beloved, believe not every spirit, or every person, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because, as he had said before, in ch. ii. 18, many false prophets are gone out into the world. But how was this trial to be made? Why, says the apostle, v. 2, *ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκετε, by this ye know, or may know, the spirit of God; or rather, as the argument seems to require, the spirit which is of God: every spirit, or person, which confesseth that Jesus Christ is"**
come in the flesh, is of God; and every spirit that con-
feffeth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not 
of God. The apostle then adds, in the closest con-
nection with these declarations, that they had al-
ready been apprized, by what rule they were to 
be guided in this trial of the spirits. V. 3, And 
this is that spirit of antichrift whereof ye have heard 
that it should come, and even now already is in the 
world; agreeably to his declaration, ch. ii. 18, that 
they had heard that Antichrist should come, and that even 
then there were many Antichrists, whereby they knew 
that it was the last time. Is it possible not to per-
ceive, that the whole of this language, again and again 
repeated, has an immediate and direct reference to 
the controversy concerning the coming of the Messiah, 
and particularly to our Lord's predictions of the 
coming of false Christs and false prophets, who would, 
if it were possible, deceive the very elect, and induce 
them to follow those who should assume that cha-
acter? And does not this language, at the same 
time furnish the fullest proof of the extreme pro-
priety of considering the gospel history as an history 
of the controversy concerning the true nature of the 
Messiah's character?

But the apostle has furnished another, and, as ap-
ppears to me, an unanswerable proof of his genuine 
meaning, in his cautions which he so particularly 
connects with his account of the coming of antichrist, 
and of many antichrists. Love not the world, neither 
the things in the world. If any one love the world,
the love of the Father is not in him; for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, are not of the Father, but are of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doth the will of God abideth for ever. In the ivth chapter, the apostle says, Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome, or triumphed over them, viz. the false prophets, mentioned in the first verse; you have seen through and got the better of their artifices; because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world, and the world, for that very reason, heareth them. They looked for a Messiah who should be a temporal prince, to raise them to the most distinguished pre-eminence among the nations; and they who spoke of the world, in this fascinating and alluring point of view, were listened to with the greatest avidity. They favoured not, as our Lord had formerly told his disciples, the things of God, or spiritual things, but those that were of men, or temporal things. In a word, this language of St. John, appears to have so evident, and so distinct an allusion to the worldly views, which were then generally entertained concerning the nature of the Messiah's character, that I do not see how, upon the supposition that the Epistles are connected with the Gospels, it is to be understood in any other sense.

I am well aware that some learned men are of the opinion, that St. John spake of the Cerinthians, or of the errors of the Gnostics, and of the Docétæ; but
but I see no reason for entertaining such an opinion. It appears to me infinitely more natural, to suppose that his language has an exclusive reference to our Lord's predictions. And what he says, in the fifth chapter, is conceived in a style that seems absolutely to preclude all doubt, that he had more immediately in view the controversy between our Lord and the Jews, whether he was the Christ, or the Messiah. Ver. 1, *Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, or the Messiah, is born of God.* And, in the fourth verse he says, most evidently, in allusion to the worldly views which the Jews had of the nature of the Messiah's character. Whosoever is born of God, by believing that Jesus is the Messiah, overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith, or our belief that Jesus is the Christ, or the Messiah. It must also be observed, that it is in this connection that the apostle asks, ver. 5, *Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?* And, at the close of the chapter, he makes this remarkable declaration, ver. 20, *We know that the Son of God, the Messiah, is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, from him who is false, or who falsely assumes the character of the Son of God: and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ! What a peculiar propriety and force is there in all this language, if it has a reference to that of our Lord! And how is it
it possible to view it in any other light than as pos-
seffing every internal character of credibility, and, 
what is more to the purpose, as harmonizing most 
- exactly with the gospel history? In one word, no-
thing could have been more natural than for the 
apostles to have adopted this language, while the 
appearance of impostors assuming the character of 
the Messiah, seemed to have rendered it so particu-
larly necessary; for, as has already been observed, 
till that controversy was finally closed by the de-
struction of Jerusalem, he could not with any pro-
priety have made use of any other language. And, 
to suppose that this epistle was written after the de-
struction of Jerusalem, is, I had almost said, to be 
blind to the strongest evidence which was ever pre-
sented to the human mind.

As there are some passages in the two Epistles of 
St. Peter which appear to me to have a relation to 
the destruction of Jerusalem, though they generally 
have been differently understood, I shall present 
my readers with the evidence of their genuine 
meaning.

The first epistle of St. Peter has been supposed, 
and as appears to me, very properly, to have been 
addressed to Christian converts from among the Gen-
tiles; for, I do not see how different parts of this epis-
tle, and particularly of the two first chapters, can be 
understood without having an exclusive relation to 
them. Thus, they are styled elect, according to the 
foreknowledge of God, and they are exhorted, not to 
fection
fashion themselves according to their former lusts, in their ignorance, that is, in the state of heathen darkness, in which they had been involved, prior to their conversion to Christianity. So again, it is said, still more decisively, that then, formerly, they were not a people, but that now, now, they were the people of God; that they had not obtained mercy, but that now, they had obtained mercy. And the description given of them in the ivth chapter, v. 3, will hardly be allowed to be applicable to any other people than to the heathen. The time past of our life may suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revelings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries; which last characteristic was peculiar to heathens.

But there cannot, perhaps, be a better proof that this epistle was written to Gentile converts, than the warm and affectionate congratulations with which St. Peter introduces his epistle, and his animated description of the inestimable value of the blessings which had already been conferred upon them; which, as addressed to Gentiles, who knew not God, had not only a peculiar force and propriety in them, but are, as I conceive, at the same time, striking proofs of the genuine authenticity of the epistle. V. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again to a lively hope, or rather, to a hope of life, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
to an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven, or, as it is in the original, ἐν οὐρανοῖς, in the heavens for you, who are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto a salvation οἰς σωτηρίας, ready to be revealed in the last time. ἐν οίᾳ In the prospect of which, ye greatly rejoice, though, now, for a short time, if need be, or seeing, from the circumstances of the times, that it is necessary, ye are in heavens through manifold temptations, that the trial of your faith in this salvation, being much more valuable than the trial of gold, that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory at the appearing, or rather, as, ἐν ἀποκάλυψις, properly signifies, at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Most commentators are of opinion, that the salvation ready to be revealed, in the last time, in the 5th verse, and the revelation of Jesus Christ, at the close of the 7th verse, relate to the final and everlasting salvation of mankind in a future state. But the course of the apostle's argument appears to me, to require these expressions to be understood of the salvation to which the Gentiles, as a people, were about to be introduced, by the full revelation of the true nature and design of the coming of the Messiah, by the destruction of Jerusalem, when the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile would be broken down, and, as this apostle, in his second epistle, has expressed it, ἀπὸ τοῦ θερέτρου, the way, or entrance, would be abundantly enlarged into the everlasting
lasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

It seems hardly possible, to put any other sense upon what the apostle says, in the 10th and following verses, namely, that it was, of this salvation that the prophets enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace, or favour, that was to come unto them; for the term, grace, or favour, most unquestionably, has an allusion to the salvation which was ready to be revealed. But this is not all; for, the apostle goes on and says, v. 11. that the prophets searched, viii, vix, to whom, or to what time, the spirit of Christ, which was in them, related, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow those sufferings. Unto whom it was revealed, that, not unto themselves, as Jews, but unto you, Gentiles, they did minister the things which are now reported unto you, by them that have preached the gospel unto you, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

This last expression is a very remarkable one; and, if I conjecture right, not only strongly confirms the preceding interpretation, but is deserving of very particular attention, as it seems to me to allude to a fact, which makes a very conspicuous figure in the history of the Acts of the Apostles, and in the history too of St. Peter himself. From this history, it appears, that nothing could have been further from the thoughts of every Jew, than
that the Gentiles should be partakers of the privileges and blessings of the Messiah's kingdom; and St. Peter was so fully confirmed in the general opinion, that he even thought it unlawful to keep company with, or to go to one of another nation. And nothing, it appears, could overcome this reluctance to have any communication with the Gentiles, but a particular revelation from heaven of the favour which was to be extended to the Gentile world. *What was I, that I should withstand God?* When, therefore, the apostle, speaking of the call of the Gentiles, says, *which things the angels, or messengers desire to look into*, he appears to me, evidently to allude to the astonishment, which this measure of divine providence produced upon the minds of the apostles, in general, as well as upon himself in particular.

But there is still further, and, as I conceive, stronger evidence what St. Peter means, by the appearing, or revelation of Jesus Christ, for St. Luke, when speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem, makes use, precisely, of the same words with St. Peter, chap. xvii. 28. 30. *As it was in the days of Lot, even thus shall it be when the Son of Man, ἀποκαλυπτεῖαι, is revealed*, i. e. when it will fully appear that the great object of the coming of the Messiah was, not as the Jews imagined, exclu-

*That this passage and the whole of the connection from the 19th verse relates, exclusively, to the destruction of Jerusalem, see the Triumphs of Christianity, p. 131 to 140.*
fively to benefit themselves, by raising them to an universal empire over the whole world, but to include within his benevolent views, the whole race of mankind, Gentiles as well as Jews.

The apostle having thus asserted that the call of the Gentiles was clearly foreseen and foretold by the ancient prophets, and having led them to expect the complete fulfilment of these prophecies, he very pertinently founds upon it an important and peculiarly appropriate admonition.

Ver. 13. Wherefore gird up the loins of your minds, be sober, and hope to the end; that is, entertain a firm confidence of the grace, or favour, which is about to be brought to you Gentiles, as a nation ἀποκάλυφη, at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

There is something extremely natural, in the apostle's congratulating the converts to Christianity, upon their being made partakers of its privileges and blessings, and in his telling them, that the time was near approaching, when these good tidings, which had been the subject of antient prophecy, would have a more extended and a wider influence upon the Gentile world. A more pleasing subject could hardly have occupied the attention of an apostle, who was now completely divested of his prejudices! Nor is there, I am bold to say, in the annals of antiquity, a stronger proof of the authenticity of a letter written under the circumstances of those times, than this chapter presents to our view. It must have been impossible for an apostle,
apostle, impressed as St. Peter was, with the inestimable value of the benefits to be conferred upon the Gentile world, not to have adopted such a language!

Having, as I conceive, in the former part of this work, when controverting the present Bishop of London's opinion, concerning the design of the transfiguration, given an accurate representation of the genuine meaning of St. Peter, when he asserted, 2 Ep. i. 16, We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the subsequent context, I shall not repeat it here, but proceed to the consideration of the second chapter; the principal object of which, appears to have been, to guard those to whom he wrote, against false prophets and false teachers, who would arise among them, as our Lord had expressly predicted, to seduce them from the truth, and particularly from the true doctrine, concerning the coming of Christ. V. 1. But there were false prophets among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in, αἵρεσις απολλονίας, destructive heresies, denying the Lord that bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom, the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness they, with feigned words, make merchandize of you; whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their destruction slumbereth not.

The
The character of these false teachers, the apostle describes, at full length, in the subsequent part of the chapter; and that his great object, in thus particularly describing them, might not be mistaken, he, in the following chapter, acquaints them with what was his principal design in both his epistles. V. 1, This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you, as, in both which I stir up your pure minds, by way of remembrance, that ye may be mindful of the words which were formerly spoken by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour; knowing this first, that there shall come, in the last days, scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation?

The apostle having asserted that, in both his epistles, his great object was, that they should be mindful of the words which were formerly spoken by the holy prophets, has, I think, clearly directed us how to understand the language of the scoffers, when they said, Where is the promise of his coming? for, in his first epistle, ch. i. 10, he tells those to whom he wrote, that the prophets had prophesied of the grace, or favour, that was about to be bestowed upon the Gentiles. He speaks also of a salvation that was ready to be revealed, and of the revelation of Jesus Christ. And, in his second epistle, he says, the entrance, or way, was about to be abundantly enlarged into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour.
Saviour Jesus Christ. And in this connection, he says, We have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, at the same time declaring, that the word of prophecy concerning his coming, was more fully confirmed, by the signs which were then appearing, to which they did well to take heed, as to a light shining in a dark place until the day dawn, and the day star, or the sun, arise upon your hearts.

In all these places, the apostle appears to me to allude to the destruction of Jerusalem, which was to open a way to the Gentiles participating in all the privileges and blessings of the Messiah's kingdom. In the chapter under consideration, the apostle uses the phrase which he had adopted in the first chapter of this epistle, where he had asserted, that the apostles had not followed cunningly devised fables when they made known the power and coming of the Lord Jesus. Here, he says, scoffers arose, in opposition, and said, Where is the promise of his coming? And the reason they gave for their scoffs, was, that all things continued as they were from the beginning of the creation. And when we combine the whole of what the apostle has said in his two epistles, with what our Lord himself had said, concerning the destruction

Dr. Benson has observed that, φως φωσκερ does commonly signify the morning star, which is called Lucifer, or Venus. But Suidas says, it sometimes signifies the sun, whose part it is φως φοέαν, to bring in the light. And, accordingly, the Syriac hath here translated it, the sun. See Benson in loc.
of Jerusalem, which had not yet taken place, I do not see how, upon the principles of sound criticism and just reasoning, the apostle's language can be otherwise applied, than to the controversy concerning the coming of the Messiah.

But besides this, there is, I think, other evidence, in the subsequent part of the chapter, that this was the apostle's genuine meaning; for, in the seventh verse, the apostle says, the heavens which are now, by the same word of prophecy, mentioned in the former epistle, are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and destruction, ἀποκαλύφθης, of ungodly men. And in the tenth verse, it is remarkable, that the apostle uses the very same language adopted by St. Paul, from the antient prophecies descriptive of temporal calamities, in 1 Thess. v. 2. The day of the Lord will so come as a thief in the night, in which day, the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burnt up. This language will probably receive a precise and determinate signification, if it is compared with what the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews has made use of; for he expressly says, that the shaking of the earth and the heavens, signifies the removing of those things that are shaken; that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. And it was a very striking part of our Lord's prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, that the powers of the heavens should be shaken. Upon our Lord's
Lord's prediction, therefore, the apostle seems to ground the following declaration, v. 13, *We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness;* and, upon this expectation he makes a most appropriate practical exhortation; *Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for these things, that is, for the new heavens and the new earth, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless, and account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation, even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you. As also, in all his epistles, speaking of these things, in which some things are hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable, wrest, as they do also the other scriptures to their own destruction.*

If I do not very much mistake, there is, in this allusion to St. Paul's epistles, very striking evidence of the genuine meaning of St. Peter, in the chapter under consideration; for it is expressly asserted by St. Peter, whatever he is treating of, that St. Paul, in his epistles, treats of the same. In all his epistles speaking in them of these things. The apostle adds, *in which are some things hard to be understood.* It has been a matter of some trouble to commentators to comprehend what the things were which St. Paul's epistles contained, that were so hard to be understood. Dr Benson has mentioned Beza, as asserting, that St. Peter has said more things, and more obscure things, concerning the
laft day, than Paul has done in any part of his epistles. And he himself says, he does not find that St. Paul has said any thing remarkably obscure or difficult in what he has said about the laft day, or about the other particulars which St. Peter has here treated of.

But these difficulties, so perplexing to Dr. Benfon, would immediately vanish, if by the things hard to be understood, in St. Paul's epiftles, be meant the dissolution of the Hebrew state, the rejeftion of the Jews, and the admission of the Gentiles to the participation of the blessings of the Messiah's kingdom; for these were subjects of which St. Paul frequently treated, and very hard indeed were they to be understood by the Jews! And that St. Peter referred to the apostle Paul's treating upon these subjects, appears to me extremely evident from his speaking of them in the clofeft connection with the coming of Chrifl, the dissolution of the heavens and the earth, and the looking for new heavens, and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

When St. Peter further says, that the ἀγάθος, the uninftuced, and the ἀστήρωτος, the unftable, wrested these hard things to their own destruction, as they did also the other scriptures; the history of the Jewish nation, as presented to us in the gospel history, and particularly in the history of the Acts of the Apostles, give the fufleft fanction to his affertion. They wrested the prophecies concerning the coming of their Messiah to their proud and ambitious
ambitious views of aggrandizement, and to their expectation of obtaining, under his auspices, an universal empire over the whole world. And, because he laid no claim to any such character, they rejected and crucified him, as a notorious malefactor and impostor. They would not attend to the awful warnings, that God was about to forsake them, and they were inflamed, even to madness, when St. Paul spoke of going to the Gentiles to make them the offers of salvation. Away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live. They persecuted, with unrelenting fury, all who ventured to speak to the Gentiles upon this subject, and, at length, brought on themselves the ruin with which they had been threatened.

I have thus faithfully endeavoured to ascertain the genuine meaning of the apostle Peter; whether I have succeeded, my readers must judge; but I feel much gratified in presenting the sentiments of the learned Dr. Lightfoot, upon this subject, whom Mr. Maltby mentions, as throwing more light upon the language and allusions of the sacred volumes, than almost all other commentators whatsoever. Speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem, he says, "It is set forth in such expressions as if it were the destruction of the whole world.

*I think it necessary to inform my readers, that I have taken some slight liberties with Dr. Lightfoot's language; but for the sense, I pledge myself, not to have misrepresented it.*
world. Moses begins this style in Deut. xxxii. 22, where he is speaking of that vengeance. A fire is kindled in mine anger, and it shall burn to the lowest hell, and it shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. So again, Jer. iv. 23, I beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form and void: and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and they trembled. I beheld, and there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. In both these instances, it might be imagined, that the whole universe were dissolving; yet, in the former, the connection plainly shows it to mean the destruction of the Jewish nation. And in the latter, it is expressly said, the whole land shall be desolate.

In the New Testament, our Lord speaks a yet stronger language, Matt. xxiv. 29. The sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken, and then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. Who would not conclude that these expressions mean, the dissolution of the world, and Christ's coming to judgment? yet the context shews plainly, that this language is meant only of the dissolution of the Jewish state; which our Lord expresses, still more plainly, when he says, v. 34, This generation shall not pass away till all these things be fulfilled. In the sixth chapter of the Revelations, St. John follows his master's style upon the very same subject; for, after having described
described the means of the destruction of this
wretched people, by sword, famine, and plague,
he, in the 12th and following verses, mentions their
dissolution itself in similar terms. The sun became
black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as
blood, and the stars of heaven fell to the earth,
and the heavens departed as a scroll that is rolled to-
gether, and every mountain and island were removed
out of their places. Here, again, the final dissoluition
of the whole world seems to be spoken of; but, in
the 16th verse, the very same words are applied to
the destruction of that very people, by our Lord, in
St. Luke, ch. xxiii. 30. They said unto the mountains,
fall on us and hide us. St. Peter's meaning therefore,
when he speaks of the heavens being dissolved by fire,
and the works that are therein, &c. Dr. Lightfoot
concludes, appears only to have been, that the
Jewish church and state were to be dissolved by the
just vengeance of God.

I cannot refrain from presenting to the reader
what this learned writer has farther said, upon the
general phraseology of the New Testament, as it
coincides, most exactly, with my own ideas upon
the subject. "As the destruction of the old world,
or of the Jewish economy, is described by such
expressions as if it was the destruction of the universe;
so," he says, "the times going before, and connected
with, the destruction of Jerusalem, are likewise de-
scribed by expressions equally suitable. Thus, fre-
quent mention is made in scripture, of the last
days,
days, which are not to be understood of the last days of the world, but of the Jewish state. The greatest mercies were promised to take place in these last days, and the worst of men and times are predicted of them, because they did not improve them. In a similar sense are such phrases as these to be understood. Upon whom the ends of the world are come; the end of all things is at hand; meaning in both cases, not the end of the world, in the strict sense of that expression, but the end of the Jewish church and state. Again, the vengeance of Christ, upon that people, in their final destruction, is called, his coming, his coming in his kingdom, his coming in clouds, and with power and great glory: nor is this language merely figurative; for our Lord had himself said, This generation shall not pass away till all these things be fulfilled. Accordingly, the day of that vengeance is called, the day of the Lord. Once more, the state of the Christian church, after the dissolution of the Jewish economy, is sometimes called the world to come, sometimes new heavens and a new earth, and sometimes, all things new; from all which it appears, that St. Peter speaks of the dissolution of the Jewish church and state, in such terms, as the scripture uses to express it by, as if it were the dissolution of the whole world. °

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I have now conducted my readers, or rather suffered myself to be conducted, through a large portion of the gospel history, and of the apostolic epistles, upon the uncontrovertible principle, that the former is an history of the controversy between our Lord and the Jews concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character, and that the latter could not have been silent upon the subject while that controversy remained at issue; that is, while the predictions of our Lord, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem were unfulfilled. The success of my inquiries, upon this principle, has in my own opinion, at least, been very satisfactory; but whether my readers will think with me must be left to time.

In the prophecy of Isaiah, there is the following remarkable passage, which particularly claims the reader's attention, ch. lxv. 2, &c. Ye are they that forsake the Lord, that forget my holy mountain. Therefore will I number you to the sword, and ye shall bow down to the slaughter. Behold my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow and howl for vexation of spirit, and ye shall leave your name for a curse to my chosen; for the Lord God shall slay thee, and call his servants by another name; for behold I create new heavens and a new earth.

It will, I think, be impossible to read this passage without being convinced, that it relates to the destruction of Jerusalem and the call of the Gentiles. Besides the wickedness which is said to be the cause of their calamities, their leaving their name for a curse, and his servants being called by another name, are extremely remarkable, and can hardly be applied to any other event than to the establishment of the Christian name. And the creating new heavens and a new earth, is the very language of the apostle Peter.
to determine. It will readily be discerned, that I had an hypothesis to support, but that hypothesis being invulnerable, there seems to have been less danger of taking unjustifiable methods of defending it. If I have, I most earnestly intreat, that the lovers of truth will come forward to expose it; for I know of nothing that would afford me greater pleasure than to see truth triumphant, whatever may be the consequences to myself. From the number of years that this subject has occupied my attention, and from the manner in which I have treated it, or those who have differed from me, I feel no apprehensions of those consequences, but rather conceive myself entitled to the approbation of all the friends of Christianity. I have however, heretofore been too sanguine upon the subject, and it would, perhaps, be more becoming in me to wait in silence for the public opinion. But be that as it may, I cannot conclude without making a few observations.

The first observation that I shall make, is, that if the gospel history be an history of the controversy between our Lord and the Jews, concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character, there is, incomparably more evidence of the truth of that history, than of any of the most celebrated writings of antiquity. Every page of the gospels contains the most striking marks of this controversy, and almost every letter of the apostles, is a strong confirmation of their having considered them as histories of
of that controversy. From hence, I think, I am warranted in this conclusion, that the miracles which are recorded in it, are deserving of the fullest credit. If these miracles had been recorded in an history, which had been deficient in the internal evidence of its authenticity, they would, in my humble opinion, have been deserving of no regard! But we have testimony the most respectable, and evidence the most unquestionable, that at the time of our Lord's appearance, the whole Jewish nation expected a person under the character of their Messiah, and that throughout the whole gospel history, and the whole period subsequent to the death of Christ to the destruction of Jerusalem, they uniformly acted under the influence of that expectation, though under an erroneous idea, that he was to be a temporal prince, to conduct them to conquest, and to an universal empire over the whole world. We have evidence too throughout the whole course of that history, that our Lord and his apostles conducted themselves in the manner, which, from the nature of their several situations might, a priori, have been expected, and that, in fact, the former could not have acted otherwise than he did, without effectually defeating the great purposes of his mission. This, I repeat, gives a credibility to the miraculous part of the gospel history, which it would otherwise want. In fact, if the miracles of the gospel, blended as they are with every page of the gospel history, were not wrought, Christianity
is the greatest and most execrable imposture that ever existed!

The late Sir William Jones, whose great attainments have deservedly placed him in the highest rank of intellectual eminence, after possessing himself of all that the sages and philosophers of all times have said upon the works of nature, has made the following observations upon the records of our religion, which the preceding work, so far as they regard the New Testament, will be found amply to justify. "I have," he says, "regularly and attentively read these holy scriptures, and am of opinion, that this volume, independently of its divine origin, contains more true sublimity, more exquisite beauty, more pure morality, more important history, and finer strains both of poetry and eloquence, than can be collected from all other books, in whatever age or language they may have been composed. The two parts of which the scriptures consist, are connected by a chain of compositions, which bear no resemblance, in form or style, to any that can be produced from the stores of Grecian, Persian, or even Arabian learning: the antiquity of these compositions no man doubts; and the unstrained application of them to events long subsequent to their publication, is a solid ground of belief that they are genuine productions, and consequently inspired."

* See Asiatic Researches, vol. iii. p. 8, 9.
The value of this testimony of Sir William Jones to the evidence and excellence of the scriptures, is greatly enhanced by a remark which he makes in another part of his writings, viz. "That his testimony on this subject, ought to have the greater weight, because, if the result of his observations had been totally different, he should nevertheless have published them; not, indeed, with equal pleasure, but with equal confidence; for truth is mighty, and whatsoever be its consequences, must always prevail."

Another observation, which I wish strongly to impress upon my readers is, that these scriptures, so confessedly excellent and full of evidence, to have full justice done them, ought to be studied with a strict regard to the sober rules of genuine criticism and just reasoning, and that both the gospels and epistles should be considered as having a special relation to the controversy between our Lord and the Jews concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character. A view to this controversy, most unquestionably, is essential to the right understanding of the New Testament. For the truth and importance of this observation, I dare venture to appeal to the xxivth of Matthew, and the parallel chapters to the fifth chapter of the 1st and the second of the 2d epistle to the Thessalonians, to the two first epistles of St. John, and to both the epistles of St.

*Ib. vol. iv. p. 3, 4.*
Peter; in all which, a regard to this controversy has tended materially to elucidate the design of the writers. The same may be said of particular passages which have been involved in so much obscurity as to lay a foundation for the objection that our Lord foretold his second coming, to judge all mankind in the generation in which he lived; such as when he said, that his apostles should not have gone over the cities of Jerusalem before the Son of Man came, and that there were some then living who should not taste of death, till they saw the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

Some writers, and those of no mean consideration in the Christian world, in their interpretation of the xxivth of Matthew, and the parallel chapters, have had recourse to types and double meanings, whereby they have greatly disfigured, if not corrupted, the simplicity of the narratives, and at the same time deprived themselves of the very important advantages which they otherwise would obviously have held forth, of clearing the sense of some of the obscurest parts of the apostolic epistles. They have, indeed, appealed to these chapters for the proof of their interpretations, but in so doing, they have manifested something like disingenuousness, in dropping the distinction they had made between the primary and secondary senses, and in taking it for granted, that it was not the destruction of Jerusalem, but the day of Judgment, that was the subject of those chapters, though they had allowed that they
they referred primarily to the former of these events.

I have been at considerable pains, to ascertain the genuine meaning of these chapters, and have offered what appears to me to be unanswerable proofs, that they relate, exclusively, to the destruction of Jerusalem. My reasonings upon those parts of the epistles, which have fallen under my notice, have been conducted upon this exclusive meaning. And, if those reasonings have led to a right understanding of those passages, the fact, that the evangelists referred exclusively to that event, will, I think, be established beyond all reasonable doubt. In fact, to do justice to the sacred writings, all double meanings and secondary senses must, in my opinion, be discarded, and the gospel history must be studied with a close attention to the peculiar circumstances of the times, and to the controversy which was then on foot, between our Lord and the Jews, concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character.

What the issue of an inquiry, conducted upon these principles, may be, it is impossible for me to say; but I think I may venture to predict, that it will contribute much towards removing the odium with which commentators have been loaded, and I fear justly loaded, by Bishop Newton in the following remarkable passage, "Many a text of scripture," he says, "seemeth plain enough to a man upon his reading it by himself, and comparing it with the context; but, upon consulting the
tribe of paraphrasts and annotators, he scarce knoweth what to think; and instead of that one genuine sense, which he conceived, he hath ten or twenty senses, or rather no sense at all. Commentors are a kind of necessary evils; there is no doing well without them or with them."

My opinion perfectly coincides with that of the present Bishop of Llandaff, that "the most critical scrutiny into the foundations of our faith, will be a confirmation of its truth, and that the time is approaching, or is already come, when Christianity will undergo a more severe investigation than it has ever yet done." His expectation, as to the issue, is this, "that catholic countries will become protestant, and that protestant countries will admit a further reformation." And I must beg leave to add my further opinion, that there are no human means so likely to produce an issue so desirable, as the studying the scriptures, upon the principles which, in the preceding work, I have most closely, and I trust impartially, adhered to. That they have not heretofore been so studied, must be lamented by every friend of Christianity, and by none more than myself, as I am persuaded, I should have been saved the anxious and laborious pursuits, which have so long occupied my attention. I can now, however, say, from a large share of experience, without detracting from the use of other sources of information, that scripture is infinitely the best interpreter of scripture, and, if a proper
proper use is made of it, that it will ultimately lead to the happiest consequences to mankind.

Another observation, naturally arising from the preceding view, is, that it establishes a most delightful harmony between the epistles and gospels; an harmony, which, at the same time, in the strongest manner confirms the authenticity of the whole. Our Lord began his ministry, by declaring, that the kingdom of heaven, or of the Messiah, was at hand. To prove this important fact, was the primary object of all his labours and of all his instructions. Upon the four great occasions, particularly when he gave his disciples a commission to announce the near approach of that kingdom; when he foretold his own sufferings and death; when he predicted the destruction of Jerusalem; and when he was arraigned, tried, and condemned, as a notorious malefactor and impostor, for assuming the character of the Messiah, he renewed the assurance of its near approach, saying, that his disciples should not have gone over the cities of Israel, in the execution of the duties of their mission, before the Son of Man came; that there were some then living, who should not taste of death till they saw the Son of Man coming in his kingdom; that as they knew, by the budding of the trees, that summer was near, so they would, as certainly know, by the signs of the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, that the kingdom of heaven was nigh, even at the doors; and that, from the time of his crucifixion, they should see the Son of Man sitting on
the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven, i.e. manifesting the true nature and design of his coming, in the destruction, not in the increased prosperity, of the Jewish nation!

In the epistles, the apostles, with a particular view to the event, which was to be the final proof of the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom, speak of the Lord being at hand, of the coming of the Lord drawing nigh, and of the coming of Christ; phrases peculiarly adapted to express the near approach of the destruction of Jerusalem. And though it will readily be allowed, that there is a degree of ambiguity in these phrases, yet, that very ambiguity will be considered by all who attend to the nature of the subject to which they relate, as no slight proof that the apostles had that awful event in their view. In some of the epistles where these

Our own times have, I think, furnished a very striking instance of the extreme propriety, and even the absolute necessity of the apostles conducting themselves in the very cautious manner, which the peculiarity of their situation required. The noted Mr. Brothers, whether from political views, or from a mental derangement, is immaterial, predicted great calamities, as about to happen to this country, in a language which could not be misunderstood. When his predictions became the subject of much attention, nothing can be more obvious, than that they, very properly, attracted the notice of Government; for no Government can, with safety, be inattentive to matters of this nature. If, therefore, the apostles had not used the language of caution, in speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem, imprisonment, or a violent death, would, in all probability, have been the consequence.
phrases occur, there is so clear and distinct a reference to the controversy concerning the coming of Christ, particularly in the two first epistles of St. John, and in the first and third chapters of the second epistle of St. Peter, that I do not see how it is to be denied, without resisting the strongest evidence! And, even in the second chapter of the second epistle to the Thessalonians, there is such a striking resemblance of language to that of our Lord in his prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, and the whole tenor of his description applies so exactly to the Jews, that both together form a strong presumption, that the apostle alludes to them. And it may, I think, be safely left to the reader to determine, whether greater advantage can accrue to the Christian religion by the application of St. Paul's language to the church of Rome, than to the Jews, the latter being intimately connected with the accomplishment of our Lord's prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem! *

* It has been observed by Mr. Zouch, that the titles of the man of sin, the son of perdition, the lawless one, have been given to different personages; to the leaders of the factional Jews, who revolted from the Romans, before the destruction of Jerusalem; to Caius Caligula, a merciless tyrant; to the emperor Titus, the delight of mankind; to Simon Magus; to the Gnostics; to Mahomet; nay, to the bright luminaries of the reformation, John Wicliff and Martin Luther."

Mr. Jones and the late Bishop of St. Asaph, to both whose opinions Mr. Kett has given his approbation, have applied them
A fifth observation that I shall trouble my readers with is, that it is impossible to be fully sensible of the value of Christianity, without paying particular attention to the circumstances of the times, when it was first published. Some idea is given us, in our Lord's sermon upon the mount, of the gross corruptions of the essential laws of morality, by the Jewish nation; and it was evidently the design of his mission in general, and of that sermon in particular, to correct those corruptions. But the prophecy of Isaiah describes our Lord as given εἰς φως ἑβαυλ, for a light to the Gentiles, and he styles himself as, τὸ φῶς τοῦ κασμίου, the light of the world.

"No candid mind," says a very able writer, "can desire, and no ingenuity could devise, a more convincing demonstration of the truth of the gospel, than the superlative pre-eminence of the morality of the gospel above the doctrines of Gentile philosophy, and the deductions of what is usually called, natural religion. The precepts of Christianity, respecting them to more modern times; but, as appears to me, without foundation. It is a fine observation of Mr. Zouch, that "the system of prophecy is not vague or uncertain, that it seldom derives any elucidation from the proposal of hasty conjectures. The events which constitute its completion, flow along the stream of time, in a regular and uninterrupted succession. Predicted revolutions, which are yet future, will, in due course, be so decidedly fulfilled, as to leave no room for scepticism itself to fluctuate in suspense." See Mr. Zouch's Attempt, p. 18, 19. How strikingly was this the case in our Lord's prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem!
lation of our lives in every branch of duty, not only excel in sublimity of sentiment, and in suitableness to this proper end, the refinement of the heart, and the exaltation of the human character, to the highest point attainable by rational intelligence; not only excel, I say, in these respects, the morality of any single philosopher of antiquity, but the concentrated wisdom of every moralist and philosopher, of every age and nation. This, surely, is a prodigious consideration, and constitutes an irresistible force of evidence. At the same time, there is no hazard, no rashness, in this assertion; no fear of incurring an imputation of groundless confidence, or childish partiality. The field is open to the unbeliever; the diligence and wit of ages have been employed in furnishing him with armour for the combat: the challenge is made in form, and the contest is capable of decision. But, it were in vain to expect from him, an open engagement on such unequal terms. He knows too well, that our Galilean has brought down from the skies what Socrates, inferior only to the Galilean, wished for, but wished in vain.

"But, one fallacy, which has probably misled the understandings of many on this subject, must not be passed by, undetected. Produce me the man, who can justly claim a superiority in native endowments, and the accomplishments of learning to the Plato's, the Aristotles, the Zenophons, the Tullys of Greece and Rome. Is that within the compass
pass of his intellect, which these heroes were unable to attain? To form a true judgment, therefore, of the powers of unassisted reason, and the progress of natural religion, we ought to recur to those systems of morality, which existed before the birth of Christianity. They alone are the reasonable specimens of those powers, the genuine proof of that progress. The various schemes of moral philosophy, which have been derived, or rather drawn up, beneath the sunshine of the gospel, have received too much illumination from that source, to pass, with considerate examiners, for a proper test of the abilities of man, unaided by revelation. Educated under those benign influences, which Christianity has exerted on life and manners, we have imperceptibly imbibed a portion of its vivifying spirit, and easily mistake that for an effulgence of native light, which is but a reflection of a brighter luminary, unobserved from a long familiarity with its effects.

"The fountain of living waters, first flowed indeed only in Judea, but has since dispersed rivulets of health and vigour through every region of the universe. Nay, further, the purer morality of the later Grecian schools, and the striking superiority in the theories of modern times, over the old philosophers, afford of themselves an incontrovertible proof, that the waters of Israel far transcend in salutary virtues, all the rivers of Damascus." 7

7 See Wakefield's Internal Evidences of the Excellence of Christianity, p. 12, &c.
I shall only add, to what this writer has so well said of the superior excellence of the Christian morality, that it embraces whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, teaching men to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this world, and to direct all their actions by the sublime principles of love to God and man. And what constitutes the principal glory of this morality is, that it carries along with it a provision for the weaknesses and frailties of human nature in the performance of the duties of it. Christianity is, in this respect, peculiarly το ἔυαγγελίον, the gospel, or good news of pardon and forgiveness, and that without the most remote encouragement to sin.

Nor is this all, for Christianity, while it chalks out the securest path to happiness in this life, teaches and encourages those who walk in it, to look forward to the rewards of immortality in a future state. The great apostle Paul, on a retrospect of his past conduct, though before his conversion he had been a persecutor and a blasphemer, cherishes, in the near prospect of a violent death, the utmost confidence in the divine mercy, and the most animating prospect of a blessed immortality. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me, a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day: and not to me only, but to all them also, that love his appearing.
appearing. And, in the same epistle, he says that, the purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath ἀποκάλυψεν: fully made known life and immortality by the Gospel.

My last observation is, that the destruction of Jerusalem, at the same time that it is a signal proof of the truth of Christianity, is likewise an awful example to all future ages of the divine vengeance on a guilty nation. The destruction of Jerusalem was a decisive issue of the controversy between our Lord and the Jews, concerning the true nature of the

* Our common translation asserts, what I do not think the apostle intended, viz. that life and immortality was brought to light by the Gospel; for we have many proofs in the gospel history, that the Jews believed in the doctrine of a future state; and the belief of the immortality of the soul and a future state, as Dr. Leland has observed, obtained among mankind, in the earliest ages; of which we have all the proof; that a matter of this nature is capable of. This learned writer adds, that “We find it equally obtained among the most barbarous, as among the most civilized nations. The ancient Scythians, Indians, Gauls, Germans, Britons, as well as the Greeks and Romans, believed that souls are immortal, and that men shall live in another state after death, though it must be confessed, their ideas of it were very obscure.” See Leland’s Advantage and Necessity of Revelation, vol. ii. p. 268-9, &c. The apostle Paul therefore, could only mean to assert, that what had before been involved in much darkness and obscurity, was now more distinctly and fully made known. And this appears to be the precise meaning of the original.

Messiah's
Messiah's character, as it shewed plainly, how much they had been mistaken, when they supposed that he was to be a temporal prince, to conduct them to conquest and to universal empire. And when it is considered, that it was particularly predicted to take place in that generation, it forms, a most striking evidence of the truth of our Lord's prophetic character. "We may safely," says the Bishop of London, "consider this prophecy as an unquestionable proof of the divine foreknowledge of our Lord, and the divine authority of the gospel; and on this ground only, (were it necessary) we might securely rest the whole fabric of our religion. Indeed, this remarkable prediction has always been considered, by every impartial person, as one of the most powerful arguments in favour of Christianity; and in our own times, more particularly, (the Bishop observes,) a man of distinguished talents, and acknowledged eminence in his profession, and in the constant habit of weighing, sifting, and scrutinizing evidence, with the minutest accuracy, in courts of justice, has publicly declared, that he considered this prophecy, if there were nothing else to support Christianity, as absolutely irresistible."

As to the example, which the punishment of the Jews exhibits to succeeding ages, it is, indeed, a most awful and affecting one; an example, which,

at this eventful and calamitous period, must have a strong tendency to impress the most hardened and insensible. Europe is bleeding at every pore, and now lies prostrate at the feet of a tyrant, the most execrable that ever disgraced the human form. And what renders its present situation the more tremendous, is, that, humanly speaking, the hopes of deliverance are dwindled almost to a point. Political sagacity appears to be completely at a loss to devise means of deliverance, from the grip of a power, whose ambition is insatiable. The nations of the continent are, at this moment, drinking deep of the cup of vengeance, and there seems but too much reason to apprehend, that still greater calamities are yet in reserve, in which our own nation may be deeply involved; and the only melancholy privilege allotted us may be, that of being the last to be subdued. The deadly hatred, avowed by the haughty despot towards this country, is well known, and his recent declaration, that he will put it out of our power to disturb the peace of mankind, i.e. to put a stop to his unjustifiable ambition, renders this highly probable. We have hitherto indeed resisted, and, in my humble opinion, nobly resisted this common enemy of mankind; and far be it from me, to discourage the exertion of those energies which have been so honourable to us, and which, I trust, will ultimately be successful; but it cannot be denied that the clouds are gathering thick around us, and are apparently ready to burst over our heads.

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It would be as easy for the Ruler of the universe, to work out our deliverance, as it has been to raise up him, who is now become the terror of the world, to be the scourge of mankind; but, have we deserved such interference? Is there that regard to religion, that love of truth, that hatred of vice, in all its forms, which might have been expected from a people so highly favoured as we have been? Is there not, rather, a most lamentable tendency to infidelity and irreligion among us; a scandalous neglect of public worship, and an immorality of conduct, both in high and in low life, that has created the most serious alarm in the minds of good men? Are there not the strongest appearances of noisy pretensions to patriotism, solely with a view to the possession of power, and a venality and corruption, that is barefaced and unblushing? And, as to reform, though the want of it is everywhere complained of, though reform or ruin has long since been proclaimed through the land, we see but feeble traces of it; and, it is at least, a doubtful matter whether instead of our becoming better, we are not, as a nation, growing worse.

When we consider these things, these signs of the times, as Bishop Newton and many other good men have observed, the stoutest and most sanguine of us all, must tremble at the natural and probable consequences of them. God give us grace that we

b See a well-written pamphlet, entitled Reform or Ruin. By John Bowdler, Esq. 1798.
may know, at least, in this our day, the things which belong to our peace, before they are hid from our eyes. Never may such blindness happen to us, as befell the Jews; never may we think that our mountain standeth so fast that it cannot be moved! Our sea-girt isle will stand us but in little stead, if Providence thinks fit to punish us. Means are never wanted to effect the purposes of the Supreme Ruler of the world, either to punish vice or to reward virtue.
APPENDIX.

Containing some Remarks upon Mr. Kett's "History the Interpreter of Prophecy."

The present imperfect state of scripture criticism is no where more strikingly visible, than in the vague and loose manner which has been adopted by all denominations of Christians, in their quotations from it. This practice was long since observed and condemned by the great Mr. Locke, and, more recently, by the late Bishop Newton, and by the present Bishop of Llandaff. See p. 2, 3, of the preceding work.

I am compelled to take some notice of what I conceive to be a practice of this sort, adopted by Mr. Kett, in his History the Interpreter of Prophecy; for, if his quotations in different parts of his work are properly applied, a great part of my reasoning, in the preceding pages, must necessarily fall to the ground. As the cause of truth is deeply concerned in this matter, as well as the success of my labours, which however, comparatively speaking, are of little consequence, Mr. Kett will not, I trust, be offended at my pointing out, what appear to me to
to be striking instances of his misapplication of scripture to subjects to which they do not in reality belong. If this charge shall prove to be unfounded, Mr. Kett will have a fair opportunity, either of vindicating the propriety of his quotations and of showing the fallacy of my reasoning, or of acknowledging that he has mistaken the sense of them.

Mr. Kett is, with the present Bishop of London, the professed advocate of the double meaning of the prophecies of the New Testament, and his principal argument for it appears to be this, "that if the prophecies of the Old Testament are allowed to admit of a primary and of a secondary accomplishment, there appears to be no reason why a similar mode of interpretation should not be adopted respecting the prophecies of the New Testament." See vol. i. p. 312. And, in the following page, he observes that, "we should be cautious in restricting the sense of any (prophecies) to one particular period, excepting those which are evidently thus confined by scripture."

It does not appear to me to be necessary to enter into the question, though a very important one, whether the prophecies of the Old Testament do actually admit of a primary and a secondary accomplishment; because all those prophecies...
prophecies with which I am more immediately concerned, and which Mr. Kett appears to me to have misapplied, are actually confined to a particular period. Our Lord’s prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, in particular, which I suppose to be closely connected with all the rest, is absolutely, and in the strongest terms that language will admit of, restricted to the generation then existing. All these things shall come to pass in this generation. This Mr. Kett has himself admitted, in the fullest manner. “Our Lord,” he says, “expressly declares, that all these things; that is, the solemn train of predictions concerning Jerusalem, should be fulfilled before the then present generation should pass away.” See p. 251.

Mr. Kett, indeed, does what he can to do away this restriction, by saying, in p. 248, that, “in their secondary sense, these words may mean, this people (the Jewish nation) shall not pass away till all be fulfilled; however dispersed, they shall continue a distinct people from the rest of the world, till the whole of this prophecy shall be accomplished, by the second coming of the Son of Man in glory.” But is not this rendering his own remark absolutely nugatory, that those prophecies, which are evidently confined by scripture, are excepted? If such an essay concerning the unity of sense; to shew that no text of scripture has more than one single sense. The learned Bishop of Llandaff has given this essay a place among his valuable collection of tracts, and has given a character of it, which justly entitles it to an attentive perusal.
guage, as our Lord has made use of, to restrict this prophecy to the destruction of Jerusalem, be insufficient, and may be evaded by the introduction of a secondary sense, and that sense too extending to very distant ages, I do not see what is the use of language, or what restriction may not be evaded!

Mr. Kett says, vol. ii. p. 284, "he has examined our Lord's prophecy, as far as relates to past events, and shewn to refer with equal certainty to the latter days;" and, in the following page, he says, "it requires no words to prove that a great part of this prophecy is actually fulfilling at this moment;" and then he puts a long string of questions, taken from this prophecy, to prove that it is now so fulfilling. But is this fair reasoning? Is it not taking for granted, what there appears to be no room for granting, but upon the absurd supposition, that while our Lord limited his prophecy to a given period in the age in which he lived, he meant it of a very distant age?

I am, indeed, ready to acknowledge, that there is one part of this prophecy, which was much to Mr. Kett's purpose, so much so, as to preclude the necessity of his having recourse to any double meanings; I mean, that Jerusalem was to be trodden down, till the time of the Gentiles should be fulfilled; but, further than this, I am unable, at present, to see any connection between this prophecy and the events which are now occurring, or are likely to occur. Mr. Kett, however, thinks otherwise, and has accordingly
cordingly applied the following passage to our Lord's second coming. *Then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in the heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn; and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.* See vol. ii. p. 326. He has also, in p. 337, applied Mark xiii. 61, 62, to the same purpose. *And the high priest asked him, saying, art thou the Christ, the son of the blessed? And Jesus said, I AM, and ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.* But the passages parallel to this last in Matthew and Luke, most distinctly confine our Lord's meaning to the events of that age. *From this time, αὐτ' ἀρτί, says the one, and from henceforth, ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν, says the other.* And this, as I have formerly observed, determines the precise meaning of the former of these passages.

I have, I think, in the preceding work, produced considerable evidence that St. Paul's description of the man of sin, relates to our Lord's prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem. But whether

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4 Messrs. Beaufobre and Lenfant, though the professed advocates for the application of St. Paul's language to the church of Rome, appear strongly to have felt the objection to such an application arising from the apostle's speaking as if he alluded to the very times in which he lived. *Toutefois, le plus grand nombre de savans, qui ont cherché à interpréter les paroles de Paul dans la destruction de Jérusalem, pensent qu'il doit être compris dans la vie même de l'apôtre.*
ther I am right in my interpretation of it, or not, I do not think Mr. Kett is justifiable in applying it both to the papacy and to that formidable power which has now risen in France. And, as to the antichrist of St. John, I will be bold to say, there is not even the shadow of evidence of his alluding to either of these powers; but, on the contrary, every evidence which can reasonably be required, that it relates to the times then existing, if not exclusively to the false Christs and false prophets which our Lord had foretold were to arise, previous to the destruction of Jerusalem. Upon this last subject, there can, I think, after what has been said, scarcely be two opinions.

Far,

dans les premiers temps du Christianisme, l'accomplissement de cette prophétie. The whole difficulty (of this interpretation) rests upon this, that St. Paul seems to infinuate that he spoke of an event which was near at hand, and which might even happen during his life. This is what has determined learned interpreters to look for the accomplishment of this prophecy in the early times of Christianity.

The answer which these learned commentators give to this objection is this,—Mais, Dieu, qui avait révélé l'événement à S. Paul, ne lui en avait pas révélé le temps. “But God, though he revealed the event to St. Paul, did not reveal to him the time when it should happen.” To which it may, I think, very fairly be replied, that though the precise time is not mentioned, yet it was sufficient that he expressly said it was near at hand. See the Preface of these Commentators to St. Paul's 2d Epistle to the Thessalonians.

* Mr. Kett, it must be acknowledged, is by no means singular in his application of the term antichrist to times more distant.
Far, however, very far am I from denying that very important prophecies are fulfilling in the awful events that are now taking place in the world, or that these events will not ultimately be productive of a new and a better order of things. Some of the passages which Mr. Kett has produced are, in my humble opinion, decisive upon this subject.

tant than those of the apostles, but he very justly observes, that, "in no times was caution in interpretation ever more necessary than in these, when party spirit in religion and in politics, is so prevalent as to mingle itself almost imperceptibly with the thoughts of almost every man's heart," p. 315. vol. i. In this I perfectly agree with him, and I am very far from attributing to Mr. Kett a party spirit, either in religion or in politics (especially as I have no knowledge of his character but what is highly creditable to him;) but I must say, that to ascribe the term antichrist, as a prophecy of St. John, to the papacy, to Mahomet, and to the Infidel power of France, is more than any man, reading the epistles of St. John, abstractedly, could ever have imagined. Mr. Kett's remarks on the papal power, as one branch or form of antichrist, have, I confess, no weight with me, nor consequently on the other branches. To St. John's epistles, and to them alone, is my appeal, and on them I rest my dissent. It is for Mr. Kett to prove, what I am persuaded he has not done, nor ever can do, that the prophecies of Daniel, and in the book of Revelations, are synonymous with the antichrist of St. John. The book of Revelations has not even mentioned the term antichrist, and I must beg leave to add, that the authenticity of this book, if Michaelis and others are to be credited, is of so doubtful a nature, that no appeal to it in matters of controversy can safely be made, at least without an acknowledgment—that it is doubtful.

But
But I do not think that there is any evidence, at least Mr. Kett has not produced any, that the new heavens and the new earth mentioned by St. Peter, in his 2d epistle, relate to this subject; or that the coming of Christ, which he mentions as the scoff of infidels, meant his second coming to introduce the reign of a thousand years. The arguments that I have adduced, that both the epistles of St. Peter have a special relation to the first coming of Christ, and to the happy change that would take place in the world, by the introduction of Christianity, are very satisfactory to my own mind. And I am the more confirmed in this opinion, by the language which, in other parts of the epistles, is adopted by St. Paul. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new. We are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus. In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

This language, it must be observed, is highly figurative, and implies no more than that the change in the moral and religious state of mankind would be so great, as to appear like a new creation; and such it really was, when the Gentile world embraced Christianity. That this fair fabric of Christianity might not itself, in process of time, be greatly defaced and so damaged as to want repair is no where said, or supposed, but rather the contrary. And we, alas, in these degenerate days, have
have seen it, in a considerable proportion of what has hitherto been called the Christian world, almost in ruins; but how, or by what means, it is to be restored to its pristine beauty and strength, I presume not to say, only in general terms, that I believe it will be so, and that probably the events which are now passing in the world will be introductory to it.

THE END.

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