ECCE HOMO!

OR,

A CRITICAL ENQUIRY INTO THE HISTORY

OF

JESUS CHRIST;

BEING A

Rational Analysis of the Gospels.

The Cross was the banner under which madmen assembled to glut the earth with blood.—*Vide chap. xviii.*

Let us not despair that Truth will one day force its way even to thrones.—*Boulanger.*

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INTRODUCTION.

THOUGH the writings of the Evangelists are in the hands of every one, nothing is more common than to find the professors of Christianity, unacquainted with the history of the founder of their religion; and even among those who have perused that history, it is still more rare to find any who have ventured seriously to examine it. It must, indeed, be acknowledged, that the ignorance of the one, and the want of reflection in the other, on a subject which they, nevertheless, regard as of infinite importance, may arise from the dislike naturally occasioned by the perusal of the New Testament. In fact, there reign in that work a confusion, an obscurity, and a barbarity of stile, well adapted to confound the ignorant, and disgust enlightened minds. Scarcely is there a history, ancient or modern, which does not possess more method and perspicuity than that of Jesus Christ; neither do we perceive that the Holy Ghost, its putative author, has surpassed, or even equalled many profane historians, whose writings are not so important to mankind. The clergy confess, that the Apostles were illiterate men,

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and of coarse manners; and it does not appear that the spirit of God, which inspired them, troubled itself with rectifyng their defects. On the contrary, it seems to have adopted them; to have accommodated itself to the weak understandings of its instruments; and to have inspired them with works wherein we meet not with the judgment, order, or precision, that are found in many human compositions. Hence, the gospels present us with a confused assemblage of prodigies, anachronisms, and contradictions, in which criticism loses itself, and which would make any other book be rejected with contempt.

It is by mysteries the mind is prepared to respect religion and its teachers. We are therefore warranted to suspect, that an obscurity was designedly given to these writings. In matters of religion it is prudent never to speak very distinctly. Truths, simple and easily understood, do not strike the human imagination in so lively a manner, as ambiguous oracles and impenetrable mysteries. Jesus Christ, although come on purpose to enlighten the world, was to be *a stumbling block* to most people. The small number of the elect, the difficulty of salvation, and the danger of exercising reason, are every where announced in the gospel. Every thing seems indeed to demonstrate, that God has sent his dear Son to the nations, on purpose only to ensnare them; and that they should not comprehend any part of the religion which he meant to promulgate.* In this the Eternal appears to have in-

* By the scriptures, and the fathers of the church, God is always represented as a *seducer*. He permitted Eve to be seduced by a serpent. He hardened the heart of Pharaoh. Christ himself was *a stone of stumbling*.

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tended to throw mortals into darkness, perplexity, a diffidence of themselves, and a continual embarrassment, obliging them to have recourse every moment to those infallible luminaries, their priests, and to remain for ever under the tutelage of the church. Her ministers, we know, claim the exclusive privilege of understanding and explaining the holy scriptures; and no mortal can expect to obtain future felicity, if he does not pay due submission to their decisions.

Thus, it belongs not to the vulgar to examine religion. On mere inspection of the gospel every person must be convinced that the book is divine—that every word contained in it is inspired by the Holy Ghost*; and that the explanations, given by the church, of that celestial work, in like manner emanate from the Most High. In the first ages of Christianity, those who embraced the religion of Jesus were only some dregs of the people; consequently, very simple, unacquainted with letters, and disposed to believe all the wonders any one chose to announce. Jesus, in his sermons, addressed himself to the vulgar only; he would have intercourse with none but persons of that cast; he constantly refused to work miracles in presence of the most clear-sighted people of the nation; he inveighed unceasingly against the learned, the doc-

* The opinion of most theologists is, that the Holy Ghost has revealed to the sacred writers even the orthography of the words they have employed, yea, even the points and commas. But supposing the reality of this inspiration, still it would not be sufficient; it would be further necessary to guarantee, that all the copyists and monks, during the ages of ignorance, who have transmitted the revealed writings, have committed no faults in transcribing them. A point or a comma, misplaced, are sufficient, we know, to alter completely the sense of a passage.

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tors, and the rich; against all in whom he could not find the pliability necessary for adopting his maxims. We see him continually extolling poorness of spirit, simplicity, and faith*.

His disciples, and after them the ministers of the church, have faithfully followed his footsteps; they have always represented faith, or blind submission, as the first of virtues; as the disposition most agreeable to God, and most necessary to salvation. This principle serves for a basis to the Christian religion, and, above all, to the power of the clergy. The pastors, therefore, who succeeded the Apostles, employed the greatest care in secreting the Gospels from the inspection of all who were not initiated in the mysteries of religion. They exhibited these books to those only whose faith they had tried, and whom they found already disposed to regard them as divine. This mysterious spirit has been transmitted down even to our days. In several countries the commonalty among Christians are interdicted from perusing the Scriptures, especially in the Romish communion, whose clergy are best acquainted with the manner of governing mankind. The Council of Trent has decreed, in the most explicit manner, that "it belongs to the church alone to decide on the true meaning of the Scriptures, and give their interpretation†."

* We find Jesus inculcating faith in all his discourses, and especially in St. Matthew and St. Mark—"He who hath faith shall remove mountains."—"He who shall believe and is baptized shall be saved," &c. Several Christian sects believe, according to these passages, that faith itself, without works, is sufficient for salvation.

† The Cardinal Pallavicini, in his History of the Council of Trent, (sess. IV.) removes every difficulty, by saying, that "all

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It is true, the reading of the sacred books is permitted, and even recommended to the Protestants, who are also enjoined to examine their religion. But faith must always precede that reading, and follow that examination; so that before reading, a Protestant is bound to believe the Gospel to be divine; and the examination which he makes of it, is allowable only, while he finds there what the ministers of his sect have resolved that he shall find; beyond this, he is regarded as an ungodly man, and often punished for the weakness of his intellects.

We must then conclude, that the salvation of Christians depends neither on the reading nor understanding of the sacred books, but in the firm belief that these books are divine. If, unfortunately, the reading or examination of any person, does not coincide with the decisions, interpretations, and commentaries of the church, he is in danger of being ruined, and of incurring eternal damnation. To *read* the gospel, he must commence with being disposed blindly to believe all which that book contains; to *examine* the gospel, he must be previously resolved to find nothing there but the holy and the adorable; in fine, to *understand* the gospel, he must entertain a fixed persuasion, that our priests can never either be themselves deceived, or wish to deceive others, in the manner they explain it. "Believe, (say they), believe on our words, that this book is the work of God himself; if you dare to doubt it, you shall be damned. Are you unable to comprehend any of what God reveals to you there? *Believe evermore:*—God has revealed himself that he may not

the faith of Christians is founded only on one single article, namely, the *infallible* authority of the church."

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be understood. *The glory of God is to conceal his word;* * or rather, by speaking in an unintelligible manner, does not God intimate that he wants every one to refer it to us, to whom he has confided his important secrets?—A truth, of which you must not doubt, seeing that we persecute in this world, and damn in the other, whoever dares to question the testimony which we bear to ourselves."

However erroneous this reasoning may appear to the profane, it is sufficient for the greater part of believers. Where, therefore, they do not read the gospel, or where they do read it, they do not examine it; where they examine, it is with prejudiced eyes, and with a fixed determination to find there only what shall be conformable to their own prejudices, and the interests of their guides. In consistency with his fears and prepossessions, a Christian believes himself lost, should he find in the sacred books reason to doubt the veracity of his priests.

With such dispositions, it is not surprising to see men persisting in their ignorance, and making a merit of rejecting the lights which reason offers them. It is thus that error is perpetuated, and that nations, in concert with those who deceive them, bestow on interest-

* *Proverbs of Solomon*, xxv. 2. It is on this odious maxim, so dishonourable to the divinity, that all mysteries are founded. What right had St. Justin to reproach the Pagans with the impiety of one of their poets, who had said that the gods, during the greater part of their time, "amused themselves with deceiving men?"—Is not the whole Bible a continual snare laid for the human understanding? Is not the whole conduct of Christ, according to the gospel itself, a snare laid for the Jews; so that hearing they might not understand, and seeing they might not believe in the Messiah?"

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ed cheats an unbounded confidence in what they regard as of the greatest importance to their own felicity. But the darkness, which for so many ages has enveloped the human mind, begins to dissipate. In spite of the tyrannic cares of their jealous guides, mankind seem desirous to burst from the pupilage, wherein so many causes combine in attempting to retain them. The ignorance in which the priesthood fostered the credulous, has vanished from amongst many nations; the despotism of priests is enfeebled in several flourishing states; science has rendered the mind more liberal; and mankind begin to blush at the ignominious fetters, under which the clergy have so long made both kings and people groan. The human mind indeed seems struggling in every country to break in pieces its chains.

Having premised this, we proceed to examine, without any prejudice, the life of Jesus Christ. We shall deduce our facts from the gospel only; memorials reverenced and acknowledged by the doctors of the Christian religion. To illustrate these facts, we shall employ the aid of criticism. We shall exhibit, in the simplest manner, the conduct, maxims, and policy of an obscure legislator, who, after his death, acquired a celebrity to which there is no reason for presuming that he pretended while alive. We shall contemplate in its cradle a religion which, at first destined solely for the vilest populace of a nation, the most abject, the most credulous, and the most stupid on earth, became, by little and little, mistress of the Romans; the firebrand of nations, the absolute sovereign of European monarchs; arbiter of the destiny of kingdoms; the cause of their friendship, and of their hate; the cement which serves to strengthen their alliance or their discord; and the leaven always ready to put

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minds in fermentation. In fine, we shall behold an artisan, a melancholy enthusiast and unskilful juggler, bursting out of a carpenter's shop, in order to deceive men of his own cast; miscarrying in all his projects; himself punished as a public incendiary; dying on a cross; and yet after his death becoming the legislator and the god of many nations, and an object of adoration to beings who pretend to common sense!

There is every reason to believe, if the Holy Ghost had foreseen the transcendant fortune which the religion of Jesus was one day to attain; if he had foreseen that this religion would, in the course of time, be received by kings, civilized nations, scholars, and persons in the higher circles of life; if he had suspected that this religion would be examined, analysed, discussed and criticised by logicians; there is, we say, reason to believe that the Holy Ghost would have left us memoirs less shapeless, facts more circumstantial, proofs more authentic, and materials better digested than those we possess on the life and doctrine of its founder. He would have chosen writers better qualified than those he has inspired, to transmit to nations the speeches and actions of the Saviour of the World; he would have made him to act and speak, on the most trifling point, in a manner more worthy of a god; he would have put in his mouth a language more noble, more perspicuous, and more persuasive; and he would have employed means more certain to convince rebellious reason, and abash incredulity.

Nothing of all this has occurred: the gospel is merely an eastern romance, disgusting to every man of common sense, and apparently addressed to the ignorant, the stupid, and the vulgar, the only persons whom

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it can mislead.* Criticism finds there no connection of facts, no agreement of circumstances, no train of principles, and no uniformity of relation. Four men, unpolished and devoid of letters, pass for the faithful authors of memoirs containing the life of Jesus Christ; and it is on their testimony, that Christians believe themselves bound to receive the religion they profess, and adopt, without examination, the most contradictory facts, the most incredible actions, the most amazing prodigies, the most unconnected system, the most unintelligible doctrine, and the most revolting mysteries!

Supposing, however, that the gospels in our hands belong to the authors to whom they are attributed; that they were in reality written by apostles or disciples of apostles, should it not follow from this alone, that their testimony ought to be suspected? Could not men, who are described as ignorant, and destitute of parts, be themselves deceived? Could not enthusiasts and very credulous fanatics imagine, that they

* Victor of Tunis informs us, that, in the sixth century, the Emperor Anastasius caused the gospels to be corrected as works composed by fools.

The Elements of Euclid are intelligible to all who endeavour to understand them; they excite no dispute among geometricians. Is it so with the Bible? and do its revealed *truths* occasion no disputes among divines? By what fatality have writings revealed by God himself still need of commentaries; and why do they demand additional lights from on high, before they can be believed or understood? Is it not astonishing, that what was intended as a guide to mankind, should be wholly above their comprehension? Is it not cruel, that what is of most importance to them, should be least known? All is mystery, darkness, uncertainty, and matter of dispute, in a religion intended by the Most High to enlighten the human race.

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had seen many things which never existed, and thus become the dupes of deception?* Could not impostors, strongly attached to a sect whereby they subsisted, and which therefore they had an interest to support, attest miracles, and publish facts, with the falsehood of which they were well acquainted? and could not the first Christians, by a *pious fraud*, afterwards add or retrench things essential to the works ascribed to the apostles? We know that Origen, so early as the third century, complained loudly of the corruption of manuscripts. "What shall we say (exclaims he) of the errors of transcribers, and of the impious temerity with which they have corrected the text? What shall we say of the licence of those, who promiscuously interpolate or erase at their pleasure?" These questions form warrantable prejudices against the persons to whom the gospels have been ascribed, and against the purity of their text.

It is also extremely difficult to ascertain, with any degree of certainty, whether those books belong to the authors whose names they bear. It is a well known fact, that in the first ages of Christianity there was a

* Whoever has perused the ancient historians, particularly Herodotus, Plutarch, Livy, and Josephus, must feel the force of this reasoning. These writers, with a pious credulity similar to that of Christians, relate prodigies pregnant with absurdities, which they themselves pretended to have witnessed, or were witnessed by others. Among the wonders that appeared at Rome, some time before the triumvirate, many statues of the Gods sweat blood and water; and there was an Ox which spoke. Under the empire of Caligula, the statue of Jupiter at Olympus burst forth into such loud fits of laughter, that those who were taking it down to carry to Rome, abandoned their work and fled in terror. A Crow prognosticated misfortune to Domitian, and an Owl paid the same compliment to Herod.

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very great number of gospels, different from one another, and composed for the use of different churches and different sects of Christians. The truth of this has been confessed by ecclesiastical historians of the greatest credit.* There is therefore reason to suspect, that the persons who composed these gospels might, with the view of giving them more weight, have attributed them to apostles, or disciples, who actually had no share in them. That idea, once adopted by ignorant and credulous Christians, might be transmitted from age to age, and pass at last for unquestionable, in times when it was no longer possible to ascertain the authors or the facts related.

It is well known, that among some fifty gospels, with which Christianity in its commencement was inun-

* Vide Tillemont, tom. ii. p. 47, 257, 438. St. Epiphan. Homil. 34. The celebrated Henry Dodwell affirms, that it was not till the reign of Trajan, or indeed of Hadrian (i. e. more than a century after Christ) that a collection, or canon, of the books of the New Testament was made. These writings had even till then been concealed in the archives of churches, and were only in the hands of priests, who could dispose of them at their pleasure. *Dodwell's Dissertations on Irenæum*, p. 66, &c. To this may be added, the profound work of Mr. Freret, published in 1766, under the title of *Examen Critique des Apologistes de la Religion Chretienne.*

It is evident, that, among the first Christian doctors, there was a great number of pious forgers, who, to make their cause prevail, framed and forged gospels, legends, romances, oracles of Sybils, and other works, of which the imposture and folly were so striking, that the church itself has been forced to reject them. To be convinced of this, we have only to cast our eyes on the work entitled *Codex Apocryphus Novi Testamenti*, published by J. A. Fabricius, at Hamburgh, 1719. The practice of framing Evangelical Romances, was not even recently left off in the Romish Church. A Jesuit, called father Jerome Xavier, a

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dated, the church, assembled in council at Nice, chose four of them only, and rejected the rest as apocryphal, although the latter had nothing more ridiculous in them than those which were admitted. Thus, at the end of three centuries, (*i. e.* in the three hundred and twenty-fifth year of the Christian era,) some bishops decided, that these four gospels were the only ones which ought to be adopted, or which had been really inspired by the Holy Ghost. A miracle enabled them to discover this important truth, so difficult to be discerned, at a time even then not very remote from that of the apostles. They placed, it is said, promiscuously, books apocryphal and authentic under an altar:—the Fathers of the Council betook themselves to prayers, in order to obtain of the Lord, that he would permit the false or doubtful books to remain *under* the altar, whilst those which were truly inspired by the Holy Ghost should place themselves above it—a circumstance which did not fail to occur. It is then on this miracle that our faith depends! It is to it that

a Missionary, in Persia, composed a ridiculous history of Jesus, his mother, and St. Peter, in the Persian and Latin languages, which was published under the title *Historica Christi Persica*, in 4to. Lugd. Batav. 1639. *L'Histoire du Peuple de Dieu*, by the Rev. Father Berruyer, is well known. In the thirteenth century, the Cordeliers composed a book under the title *L'Evangila Eternal.*

In all ages, Christians, whether Orthodox or Heretics, have been piously occupied in deceiving the simple. Some have gone so far as to palm works on Jesus, and we have a pretended letter of his to king Abgarus. It ought to be remarked, that authors approved by the Church, such as St. Clemens Romanus, St. Ignatius Martyr, St. Justin, and St. Clement of Alexandria, have quoted passages which are not to be found in the four gospels admitted at present.

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Christians owe the assurance of possessing the true gospels, or faithful memoirs of the life of Christ! It is from these only they are permitted to deduce the principles of their belief, and the rules of conduct which they ought to observe, in order to obtain eternal salvation!

Thus, the authority of the books which serve for the basis of the Christian religion, is founded solely on the authority of a council, of an assembly of priests and bishops. But these bishops and priests, judges and parties in an affair wherein they were obviously interested, could they not be themselves deceived? Independently of the apocryphal miracle, which enabled them to distinguish the true gospels from the false, had they any sign, which could fairly enable them to distinguish the writings which they ought to receive from those which they ought to reject?

Some will tell us, that the church assembled in a general council is infallible; that then the Holy Ghost inspires it, and that its decisions ought to be regarded as those of God himself. If we demand, where is the proof that the church enjoys this infallibility? It will be answered, that the gospel assures it, and that Jesus Christ has expressly promised to assist and enlighten his church until the consummation of ages. Here the incredulous will reply, that the church then, or its ministers, create rights to themselves; for it is their authority which alone establishes the authenticity of books whereby their own authority is established; this is obviously a circle of errors. In short, an assembly of bishops and priests has decided, that the books which attribute to themselves an infallible authority, have been divinely inspired.

Notwithstanding that decision, there still remain

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some difficulties on the authenticity of the gospels. In the first place, it may be asked, whether the decision of the Council of Nice, composed of three hundred and eighteen bishops, ought to be regarded as that of the universal church? Were all who formed that assembly entirely of the same opinion among themselves? Were there no disputes among these men inspired by the Holy Ghost? Was their decision unanimously accepted? Had not the secular authority of Constantine a chief share in the adoption of the decrees of that celebrated council? In this case, was it not the imperial power, rather than the spiritual authority, which decided the authenticity of the gospels?

In the second place, many theologists agree, that the universal church, although infallible in dogma, may err in *facts*. Now it is evident, that in the case alluded to, dogma depends on fact. Indeed, before deciding whether the dogmas contained in the gospels be divine, it was necessary to know, beyond the possibility of a doubt, whether the four gospels in question were really written by the inspired authors to whom they are ascribed; this is obviously *a fact*. It was further necessary to know, whether these gospels have never been altered, mutilated, augmented, interpolated, or falsified, by the different hands through which they have passed in the course of three centuries; this is likewise *a fact*. Can the fathers of the church infallibly guarantee the probity of all the depositaries of those writings, and the exactness of all the transcribers? Can these fathers decide definitively, that, during so long a period, none could insert marvellous relations or dogmas in these memoirs, unknown to those who are their supposed authors? Does not ecclesiastical history inform us, that, in the origin of Christianity, there were

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schisms, disputes, heresies, and sects without number; and that each of the disputants founded his opinions on the gospels? Even in the time of the Council of Nice, do we not find that the whole church was divided on the fundamental article of the Christian religion, the divinity of Jesus?

Thus, on considering the matter closely, it will be seen that the Council of Nice was the true founder of Christianity, which, till then, wandered at random; did not acknowledge Christ to be god; had not any authentic gospels; was without a fixed law; and had no code of doctrine whereon to rely. A number of bishops and priests, very few in comparison of those who composed the whole Christian church, and these bishops very little in union among themselves, have decided on the point most essential to the salvation of nations. They have decided on the divinity of Jesus; on the authenticity of the gospels; that, according to these, their own authority ought to be deemed infallible. In a word, they have decided on faith! Nevertheless, their decisions might have remained without force, if they had not been backed by the authority of Constantine. This prince gave prevalence to the opinion of these fathers of the Council, who knew how to draw him, for a time, to their own side;* and who, amidst this multitude of gospels and writings with which Christianity was inundated, did not fail to declare those divine,

* Ecclesiastical history proves, that Constantine afterwards persecuted Athanasius, exiled him to Treves, and died an Arian. His son Constantine lived and died in the same sect. Father Petau the Jesuit, and other learned men, believed that the Church was Socinian or Arian before the council of Nice. It is at least certain, that the word *consubstantial*, which was adopted by that council, had been condemned by the council of Antioch held

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which they judged most conformable to their own particular opinions, or to the ruling faction. In religion, as in other things, *the reasoning of the strongest party is always the best.*

Behold then, in the last resort, the authority of an emperor, who determines the chief points of the Christian religion! This emperor, but little fixed in his own faith, decides, until further orders, that Jesus is consubtantial with the Father, and compels his subjects to receive, as inspired, the four gospels we have in our hands. It is in these memoirs, exclusively adopted by some fathers in the Council of Nice; by them attributed to apostles, or unexceptionable witnesses, inspired by the Holy Ghost; by them proposed to serve as an indispensible rule to Christians—that we are to seek for the materials of our history. We shall state them with fidelity; we shall compare, and connect the relations, often discordant, which they contain; we shall see if the facts which they detail are worthy of God, and calculated to procure to mankind the advantages which they expect. This enquiry will enable us to judge rightly of the Christian religion; of the degree of confidence we ought to place in it; of the esteem we ought to entertain for its lessons and dogmas; and of the idea we should form of Jesus its founder.

Though, in composing this history, we have laid it down as a rule to employ the gospels only, we pre-

against the famous Paul of Samosata. But our doctors have recourse to saying, with St. Augustine, that the ancient general councils were corrected by posterior councils; or else they tell us, with the Cardinal de Cusa, "that the Church, by changing its opinion, obliges us to believe that God also changes his." Thus it is that the clergy sport with Christians.

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sume not to flatter ourselves, that it will please every body, or that the clergy will adopt our labours. The connections which we shall form; the interpretations we shall give; the animadversions we shall present to our readers; will not be always entirely agreeable to the views of our spiritual guides, the greater part of whom are enemies to all enquiry. To such men we would state, that criticism gives a lustre to truth; that to reject all examination, is to acknowledge the weakness of their cause; and that not to wish for discussion, is to avow it to be incapable of sustaining a trial.

If they tell us, that our ideas are repugnant to the decisions of councils, of the fathers, and of the universal church; to this we shall answer, that, according to the sacred books, *opposition* is not always a crime; we shall plead the example of an apostle, to whom the Christian religion is under the greatest obligations—what do we say!—to whom alone, perhaps, it owes its existence. Now this apostle boasts of having *withstood* the great St. Peter to his face, that visible head of the church, appointed by Christ himself to feed his flock; and whose infallibility, therefore, is at least as probable as that of his successors, and even that of the church assembled in œcumenical council.

If they tax us with innovation, we shall plead the example of Jesus himself, who was regarded as an *innovator* by the Jews, and who was a martyr for the reform he wanted to introduce. We, however, candidly declare, that we have no desire to imitate him in this—we applaud only *to* the martyrdom exclusively. If the tenets advanced be unacceptable, the author, as he has no pretensions to divine inspiration, leaves to every one the liberty of rejecting or receiving his in-

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terpretations, and method of investigation. He does not threaten with eternal torments those who resist his arguments; he has not credit enough to promise heaven to such as yield to them; he pretends neither to constrain, nor to seduce those who do not think as he does. He is desirous only to calm the mind; allay animosity; and sooth the passions of those zealots, who are ever ready to harass their fellow creatures, on account of opinions which may not appear equally convincing to all the world. He promises to point out the ridiculous cruelty of those men of blood, who persecute for dogmas which they themselves do not understand. He ventures to flatter himself, that such of his readers as peruse this enquiry with coolness, will acknowledge, that it is very possible to doubt of the inspiration of the gospels, and of the divine mission of Jesus, without ceasing, notwithstanding that, to be a rational and honest man.

Such as are exasperated against this work, are entreated to remember, that faith is a gift of heaven; that *the want of it is not a vice;* that if the Jews, who were eye witnesses of the wonders of Christ, did not believe them, it is very pardonable to doubt them at the beginning of the nineteenth century, especially on finding that the narrative of these marvels, said to have been inspired by the Holy Ghost, are not uniform, nor placed in harmony with each other. In fine, fiery devotees are earnestly entreated to moderate their holy rage, and suffer the meekness, so often recommended by their divine Saviour, sometimes to occupy the place of that bitter zeal, and persecuting spirit, which creates so many enemies to the Christian religion and its doctors. Let them remember, that if it is to patience and forbearance Christ promises the

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possession of the earth, it is much to be feared that pride, intolerance, and inhumanity, will render the ministers of the church detestable, and make them lose that empire over minds, which to them is so agreeable. If they wish to reign over rational men, they must display reason, knowledge, and, above all, virtues more useful than those wherewith the teachers of the gospel have so long infested society. Jesus has said, in the clearest manner, "*Happy are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth;*" unless indeed interpreters should pretend, that this only signifies the necessity of persecuting, exterminating, and cutting the throats of those whose affections they wish to gain.*

If it were permitted to cite the maxims of a profane person by that of the Son of God, we would quote

* The modern religion of Europe, says the author of *The System of Nature*, has visibly caused more ravages and troubles than any other superstition; it is in that respect very accordant to its principles. They may well preach tolerance and mildness in the name of a despotic God, who claims a right to the homage of the whole earth; who is extremely jealous that any other doctrines should be received than what have his sanction; who punishes cruelly for erroneous opinions; who demands unbounded zeal from his adorers. Such a being must consequently make fanatical persecutors of all men. The theology of the present day is a subtile venom, calculated, through the importance which is attached to it, to infect every one. By dint of metaphysics, modern theologians have become systematically absurd and wicked. By once admitting the odious ideas which they entertain of the divinity, it is impossible to make them understand that they ought to be humane, equitable, pacific, indulgent, and tolerant. They pretend that these humane and social virtues are not seasonable in the cause of religion, and would be treason in the eyes of the celestial Monarch, to whom every thing ought to be sacrificed.

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here the apophthegm of the profound Machiavel, that "empires are preserved by the same means whereby they are established." It was by dint of meekness, patience, and precaution, that the disciples of Jesus succeeded in establishing Christianity. Their successors have employed violence; but not until they found themselves supported by devout tyrants. Since then, the gospel of peace has been the signal of war; the pacific disciples of Jesus have become implacable warriors; have treated each other as ferocious beasts; and the church has been perpetually torn by dissensions, schisms, and factions. If the primitive spirit of patience and meekness does not quickly return to the aid of religion, it is to be feared that it will become the object of the hatred of nations, who begin to feel that morality is preferable to obscure dogmas, and that peace is of greater value than the holy frenzy of the ministers of the gospel.

We cannot, therefore, with too much earnestness exhort them, for their own sakes, to moderation. Let them imitate their divine Master, who never employed his Father's power to exterminate the Jews, of whom he had so much to complain. He did not make the armies of heaven descend, in order to establish his doctrine; he chose rather to surrender to the secular arm than give up the infidels, whom his prodigies and transcendent reasoning could not convince. Though he was the depositary of the power of the Most High; though he was inspired by the Holy Spirit; though he had at his command all the annals of Paradise; we do not find that he has performed any great miracles on the understandings of his auditory. He suffered them to remain in their blindness, though he had come on purpose to enlighten them. We cannot doubt, that a

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conduct so wise was intended to make the pastors of his church (who are not possessed of more persuasive powers than their master), sensible that it is not by violence they can reconcile the mind to incredible things; and that it would be unjust to force others to comprehend what, without favour from above, it would be impossible for themselves to comprehend; or what, even with such favour, they but very imperfectly understand.

But it is time to conclude an introduction, perhaps, already too long to a work which, even without preamble, may be tiresome to the clergy, and irritate the temper of the devout, particularly of female devotees. The author does himself the justice to believe, that he has written enough to be allowed the privilege of expecting to be attacked by a cloud of writers, obliged, by situation, to repel his blows, and to defend, right or wrong, a cause wherein they are so much interested. He reckons that, on his death, his book will be cruelly calumniated; his reputation torn; and his arguments taken to pieces or mutilated. He expects to be treated as impious—a blasphemer—as antichrist; and to be loaded with all the epithets which the pious are in use to lavish on those who disquiet them. He will not, however, sleep the less tranquil for that; but as his sleep may prevent him from replying, he thinks it his duty to inform his antagonists before hand, that *injuries are not reasons*. He does more—he bequeaths them charitable advice, to which the defenders of religion do not usually pay sufficient attention. They are then apprised, that if, in their learned refutations, they do not resolve completely *all* the objections brought against them, they will have done nothing for their cause. The *infallible* defenders of a re-

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ligion, in which it is affirmed, that every thing is divinely inspired, are bound not to leave a single argument behind, and ought to be convinced that answering to an argument is not always setting it aside. They should please also to keep in remembrance, that a single falsehood, a single absurdity, a single contradiction, or a single blunder, fairly pointed out in the gospels, is sufficient to render suspected, and even to overturn, the authority of a book which ought to be perfect in all its parts, if it be true, that it is the work of an infinitely perfect Being. An incredulous person, being but a man, may sometimes reason wrong; but it is never permitted to a God, or his instruments, either to contradict themselves, or to talk nonsense.*

* They shut our mouths, says Mirabaud, by asserting, that God himself hath spoken, and thus made himself known to men. But when, where, and to whom hath he spoken? Where are the divine oracles? An hundred voices raise themselves at the same moment; an hundred hands exhibit them to me in absurd and discordant collections. I run them over, and, through the whole, I find that the God of *wisdom* has spoken an obscure, insidious, and irrational language; that the God of *goodness* has been cruel and sanguinary; that the God of *justice* has been unjust, partial, and ordered iniquity; that the God of *mercies* destines the most unhappy victims of his anger, to the most hideous punishments. Many obstacles, besides, present themselves when men attempt to verify the pretended precepts of a divinity, who has never literally held the same language in any two countries; who has spoken in so many places; at so many times; and always so variously, that he appears every where to have shown himself, only with the determined design of throwing the human mind into the most strange perplexity.—*Vide System of Nature*, vol. iii. p. 126.

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ECCE HOMO!

OR,

A CRITICAL ENQUIRY INTO THE HISTORY OF

JESUS CHRIST.

CHAP. I.

ACCOUNT OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE AND THEIR PROPHETS—ENQUIRY INTO THE PROPHECIES RELATING TO JESUS.

HOWEVER slightly we cast our eyes over the history of the Jews, such as it is transmitted in their sacred books, we are forced to acknowledge, that this people were at all times the blindest, the most stupid, the most credulous, the most superstitious, and the silliest that ever appeared on the earth. Moses, by dint of miracles, or delusions, succeeded in subjugating the Israelites.* After having liberated them from

* Justin Martyr informs us, that Moses was the grandson of a great magician, who communicated to him all his art. Manetton and Chereman, Egyptian historians, respecting whom testimonies have been transmitted by Joseph the Jew, state that a multitude of *lepers* were driven out of Egypt by king Amenophis; and that these exiles elected for their leader a priest of Heliopolis, whose name was Moses, who formed for them a religion and a code of laws. Joseph. *contra* Ap-

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the iron rod of the Egyptians, he put them under his own. This celebrated legislator had evidently no other intention than to subject the Hebrews for ever to his purposes, and, after himself, to render them the slaves of his family and tribe. It is indeed obvious, that the Mosaical economy had no other object than to deliver up the people of Israel to the tyranny and extortions of priests and Levites. These the law, which was promulgated in the name of the Eternal, authorised to devour the rest of the nation; and crush them under an insupportable yoke. The chosen people of God were, in short, destined solely to be the prey of the priesthood; to satiate their avarice and ambition; and to become the instrument and victim of their passions.

Hence, by the law and policy of the priests, the people of God were kept in a profound ignorance; in an abject superstition; in an unsocial and savage

pion, lib. i. c. 9, 11, 12.—Diodorus Siculus also relates the history of Moses; *vide* translation of Abbe Tanasson.—From the Bible itself it appears, that Moses began his career by assassinating an Egyptian, who was quarrelling with a Hebrew; after which he fled into Arabia, and married the daughter of an idolatrous priest, by whom he was often reproached for his cruelty. Thence he returned into Egypt, aad placed himself at the head of his nation, which was dissatisfied with King Pharoah. Moses reigned very tyrannically. The examples of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, show to what kind of people he had an aversion. He at last disappeared like Romulus, no one being able to find his body, nor the place of his sepulture. The author of *The Three Impostors*, a translation of which we understand is preparing for the press, states that Moses concealed himself in a cave, or pit, which he had found in his solitude, where he retired from time to time, under pretence of holding conference with his God; and which he had for a long time destined for his grave, in order that the people, not finding his body, might persuade themselves it had been carried to heaven.

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aversion for the rest of mankind; in an inveterate hatred of other forms of worship; and in a barbarous and sanguinary intolerance towards every foreign religion.* All the neighbours of the Hebrews were, therefore, their enemies. If the holy nation was the object of the love of the Most High, it was an object of contempt and horror to all those who had occasion to know it. For this it was indebted to its religious institutions; to the labours of its priests; to its diviniers, and its prophets, who continually profited by its credulity, in displaying wonders, and kindling its delirium.†

Under the guidance of Moses, and of generals or judges who governed them afterwards, the Jewish peo-

* Josephus informs us that the surrounding nations considered the Jews "the most stupid of barbarians, and that they had never invented any thing useful to man." *Joseph. c. Appion*, lib. 2. See also the work entitled *Opinions des Anciens sur les Juifs*, by Mirabaud. Yet there are men of letters blind enough to maintain, that the Greeks borrowed a great number of philosophical and theological ideas from the Jews!

† The art of prophecying was then an actual profession, and no doubt a useful and profitable branch of commerce in that miserable nation, which believed God to be constantly busy in their affairs. St. Jerome says, that the Sadducees rejected the prophets, contenting themselves with believing the five books attributed to Moses. Dodwell, *de jure laicorum*, asserts, that the prophets prepared themselves to prophecy by drinking wine. *Vide* p. 259. We actually find *Isaiah* complaining that "the priests and the prophets have erred *through strong drink*; they are swallowed up with *wine*; they are out of the way *through strong drink*; they err in vision; they stumble in judgment," chap. xxviii. 7. It seems they were jugglers, poets, and musicians, who had made themselves masters of their trades, and knew how to exercise them profitably, and live comfortably.

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ple distinguished themselves only by massacres, unjust wars, cruelties, usurpations, and infamies, which were enjoined them in the name of the Eternal.* Weary of the government of their priests, which drew on them nothing but misfortunes and bloody defeats, the descendants of Abraham demanded kings;† but, under these, the state was perpetually torn with disputes between the priesthood and the government. Superstition aimed always at ruling over policy. Prophets and priests pretended to reign over kings, of whom such as were not sufficiently submissive to the interpreters of heaven, were renounced by the Lord; and, from that time, unacknowledged and opposed by their own subjects. Fanatics and impostors, absolute masters of the understandings of their nation, were continually ready to rouse it, and excite in its bosom the most ter-

* Proud of the protection of Jehovah, the Hebrews marched forth to victory. Heaven authorised them to commit knavery and cruelty. Religion, united to avidity, rendered them deaf to the cries of nature; and, under the conduct of inhuman chiefs, they destroyed the Canaanitish nations with a barbarity at which every man must revolt, whose reason is not annihilated by superstition. Their fury destroyed every thing, even infants at the breast, in those cities whither these monsters carried their victorious arms. By the commands of their God, or his prophets, good faith was violated, justice outraged, and the most unheard of cruelties exercised.—*Boulanger.*

† It appears that the Lord seldom or ever made a person a king for his goodness, or foreknew how he would turn out. He first of all chose *Saul*, one would think for his tallness; and he soon repented of that; then *David* seemed to be chosen for his fresh colour and courage; and the Lord was so fond of him as to promise him on oath, that he would fix the crown on his seed for ever; yet only a *sixth part* of the promise remained to his grandson; and ever since the captivity, *all* the promise has been forgot.—*P. Anet.*

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rible revolutions. It was the intrigues of the prophets that deprived Saul of his crown, and bestowed it on David, *the man according to God's own heart*—that is to say, devoted to the will of the priests.* It was the prophets, who, to punish the defection of Solomon in the person of his son, occasioned the separation of the kingdoms of Judea and Israel. It was the prophets who kept these two kingdoms continually at variance; weakened them by means of each other; desolated them by religious and fatal wars; conducted them to complete ruin; a total dispersion of their inhabitants; and a long captivity among the Assyrians.

So many calamities did not, however, open the eyes of the Jews, who were obstinate in refusing to acknowledge the true source of their misfortunes. Restored to their homes by the bounty of Cyrus, they were again governed by priests and prophets, whose maxims rendered them turbulent, and drew on them the hatred of sovereigns who subdued them. The Greek princes treated with the greatest severity a people whom the

* The prophet Samuel, displeased with Saul, who refused to second his cruelty, declared that he had forfeited the crown, and raised up a rival to him in the person of David. Elias the prophet appears to have been a seditious subject, who, finding himself unable to succeed in his rebellious designs, thought proper to escape deserved punishment by flight. Jeremiah himself gives us to understand, that he conspired with the Assyrians against his besieged country. He seems to have employed himself in depriving his fellow citizens of both the will and the courage to defend themselves. He purchased a field of his relations, at the very time when he informed his countrymen that they were about to be dispersed, and led away into captivity. The king of Assyria recommended this prophet to his general Nabuzaradan, whom he commanded to take great care of him.—*See Jeremiah.*

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oracles and promises of their prophets rendered always rebellious, and ungovernable. The Jews, in fine, became the prey of the Romans, whose yoke they bore with fear, against whom impostors often incited them to revolt, and who at last, tired of their frequent rebellions, entirely destroyed them as a nation.

Such, in a few words, is the history of the Jewish people. It presents the most memorable examples of the evils which fanaticism and superstition produce; for it is evident that the continual revolutions, bloody wars, and total destruction of that nation, had no other cause than its unwearied credulity; its submission to priests; its enthusiasm; and its furious zeal, excited by the inspired. On reading the Old Testament, we are indeed forced to confess, that the people of God (thanks to the roguery of their spiritual guides) were, beyond contradiction, the most unfortunate people that ever existed. Yet the most solemn promises of Jehovah seemed to assure to that people a flourishing and puissant empire. God had made an eternal alliance with Abraham and his posterity; but the Jews, far from reaping the fruits of this alliance, and far from enjoying the prosperity they had been led to expect, lived continually in the midst of calamities, and were, more than all other nations, the sport of frightful revolutions. So many disasters, however, were incapable of rendering them more considerate; the experience of so many ages did not hinder them from relying on oracles so often contradicted; and the more unfortunate they found themselves, the more rooted were they in their credulity. The destruction of their nation could not bring them to doubt either of the excellence of their law, the wisdom of their institutions, or the veracity of their prophets, who succes-

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sively relieved each other, either in menacing them in the name of the Lord, or in re-animating their frivolous hopes.

Strongly convinced that they were the sacred and chosen people of the Most High, alone worthy of his favours, the Jews, in spite of all their miseries, were continually persuaded that their God could not have abandoned them. They therefore constantly looked for an end to their afflictions, and promised themselves a deliverance, which obscure oracles had led them to expect. Building on these fanatical notions, they were at all times disposed to listen with avidity to every man who announced himself as inspired by Heaven; they eagerly ran after every singular personage who could feed their expectations; they followed whoever had the secret of astonishing them by impostures, which their stupidity made them take for miracles, supernatural works, and unquestionable signs of divine power. Disposed to see the marvellous in the most trifling events, every adroit impostor was on the watch to deceive them, and was certain of making more or less adherents, especially among the populace, who every where are destitute of experience and knowledge.

It was in the midst of a people of this disposition, that the personage appeared whose history we write. He very soon found followers among the most despicable of the rabble. Seconded by these, he preached, as usual, reformation to his fellow citizens; he wrought wonders; he styled himself the envoy of the Divinity; he particularly founded his mission on vague, obscure, and ambiguous predictions, contained in the sacred books of the Jews; he applied them to himself; he announced himself as the Messiah or messenger, the deliverer of Israel, who for so many ages was the ob-

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ject of the nation's hope. His disciples, his adherents, and afterwards their successors, have found means to apply to their master the ancient prophecies, wherein he seemed the least perceptibly designed. The Christians, docile and full of faith, have had the good fortune to see the founder of their religion predicted in the clearest manner throughout the whole Old Testament. By dint of allegories, figures, interpretations, and commentaries, their doctors have brought them to see in this shapeless compilation all that they had an interest in pointing out to them. When passages taken literally did not countenance deceit agreeable to their views, they contrived for them a twofold sense; they pretended, that it was not necessary to understand them literally, but to give them a *mystical*, *allegorical*, and *spiritual* meaning. To explain, therefore, these pretended predictions, they continually substituted one name for another; they rejected the literal meaning, in order to adopt a figurative one; they changed the most natural signification of words; they applied the same passages to events quite opposite; they retrenched the names of some personages plainly designed, in order to put in their place that of Jesus; and in all this, they did not blush to make the most crying abuse of the principles of language.*

* Any thing may be found in the Bible, if it be read with the imagination of St. Augustine, who pretended to see all the New Testament in the Old. According to him, the death of Abel is a type of that of Christ; the two wives of Abraham are the synagogue and the church: a piece of red cloth, held up by an harlot, who betrayed Jericho, signifies the blood of Christ; the lamb, goat, and lion, are figures of Jesus Christ; the brazen serpent represents the sacrifice on the cross. Even the mysteries of the Christian religion are announced in the Old Tes-

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The third chapter of Genesis furnishes us with a striking example of the manner in which the doctors of the Christian religion have allegorised passages of scripture, in order to apply them to Jesus. In this chapter God says to the serpent, convicted of having seduced the woman, *the seed of the woman shall bruise thy head.* This prophecy appears with so much the more difficulty to apply to Christ, that these words follow the preceding—*and thou shalt bruise his heel.* We are much embarrassed to comprehend, why that *seed of the woman* must be understood of Jesus. If he was *the Son of God*, or God himself, he could not be produced from the *seed of the woman;* if he was man, he is not pointed out in a particular manner by these words; for all men, without exception, are produced from *the seed of women.* According to our interpreters, the serpent is sin; the seed of the woman that bruises it, is Jesus incarnate in the womb of Mary. Since the coming of Christ, however, sin, typified by the ser-

tament: Manna represents the Eucharist, &c.—*Vide St. Aug. Serm.* 78, & *Ep.* 156.

How can a man, in his senses, see in the *Immanuel* announced by Isaiah, the Messiah, whose name is Jesus? How discover in an obscure and crucified Jew, *a leader who shall govern Israel?* How see a *royal deliverer and restorer* of the Jews in one, who, far from delivering his nation, came only to destroy their laws? and, after whose coming, their land was desolated by the Romans? A man must be sharp-sighted indeed to find the Messiah in their predictions. Jesus himself does not seem to have been more clear or happy in his. In St. Luke (c. 21), he speaks of the last judgment; he mentions angels, who at the sound of the trumpet, assemble mankind before him; he adds, "verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away until these things are accomplished." The world, however, still stands, and Christians have been expecting the last judgment for years!

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pent, has at all times subsisted; from which we are warranted to conclude, that Jesus Christ has not destroyed it, and that therefore the prediction is neither literally nor allegorically accomplished.

In the twenty-second chapter of Genesis, God promises to Abraham, that in his seed *all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.* What we stile prosperity, the Hebrews termed blessings. If Abraham and his race enjoyed a continued prosperity, it was only for a very short period; the Hebrews became afterwards the slaves of the Egyptians, and were, as has been seen, the most unfortunate people on earth. Christians have also given a mystic sense to this prophecy:—they substitute the name of Jesus in place of that of Abraham, and it is in him that all the nations shall be blessed; the advantages they shall enjoy will be persecutions, calamities, and misfortunes of every kind; and his disciples, like himself, shall undergo the most painful punishments. Hence we see, that, following our interpreters, the word *blessing* has changed its meaning; it no longer implies prosperity; it signifies what in ordinary language, is termed curses, disasters, afflictions, troubles, divisions, and religious wars—calamities with which the Christian nations have been continually *blessed* since the establishment of the church.*

Christians believe that they see Jesus expressly announced in the 49th chapter of Genesis. The patriarch Jacob there promises sovereign power to Judah. "The sceptre (says he) shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." It is thus that several interpreters translate the

* See chapter XVIII. of this work.

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tenth verse of the 49th chapter of Genesis. Others have translated it thus, "the authority shall for ever be in Judah, when the Messiah shall have come." Others read, "the authority shall be in Judah, till the messenger receive in Shiloh the sovereign power." Others again render the passage in this manner, "the people of Judah shall be in affliction, till the messenger of the Lord comes to put an end to it;" and according to others, "till the city of Shiloh be destroyed."

This diversity in the translation of the same passage ought unquestionably to render the prophecy very suspicious. First, we see that it is impossible to determine the signification of the word *Shiloh*, or to ascertain, whether it be the name of a man or a city. Secondly, it is proved, by the sacred books, received equally by Jews and Christians, that the sovereign power is gone from Judah; was wholly annihilated during the Babylonish captivity, and has not been re-established since. If it is pretended, that Jesus came to restore the power of Judah, we assert, on the contrary, that, in the time of Christ, Judah was without authority, for Judah had submitted to the Romans. But our doctors have again recourse to allegory:—according to them, the power of Judah was the spiritual power of Jesus over Christians, designed by Judah.

They, in like manner, see Christ announced by Balaam, who by the bye was only a false prophet. He thus expresses himself in the 24th chapter of Numbers (16, 17)—"He hath said, who heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the Most High, who saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open: I shall see him but not now; I shall behold him but not nigh; there shall come a star out of Jacob,

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and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel," &c. In this unintelligible jargon, they pretend to shew Christians a clear prediction of the founder of their religion. It is he who is the star, because his luminous doctrine enlightens all minds. *This sceptre, which shall rise out of Israel,* is the cross of Christ, by the aid of which he has triumphed over the Devil, who, in spite of this victory, ceases not to reign still on earth, and to render useless the triumph of Jesus.*

But of all the prophecies contained in the Old Testament, there is not one to which the Christian doctors have attached more importance than that found in Isaiah, chap. vii. 14. *A virgin,* or a young woman, (for the Hebrew word signifies both,) *shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.* To find out Jesus Christ in this prediction, it is first of all necessary to be convinced, that this virgin or woman is Mary; next, it is necessary, not to entertain a doubt, whether Immanuel be the same with Jesus. It has been objected, and will always be objected, against this pro-

* Devils are considered as the enemies and seducers of the human race, and perpetually busied in drawing them into sin. A power is attributed to them of performing miracles, similar to those wrought by the Most High; and, above all, a power that counteracts the Almighty, and renders all his projects abortive. Though the Christian religion did not formerly allow the same power to the Devil as to God, it supposed that that malevolent Being prevented mankind from entering into the enjoyment of the felicity destined them by the goodness of God, and led most of them into eternal perdition. Christians, however, now virtually attribute to the Devil an empire much more extensive than that of the Supreme Being. The latter with difficulty saves a few elect; while the former carries off, in spite of him, the greater part of mankind, who listen to his destructive temptations rather than the absolute commands of God.

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phecy, that it is sufficient to read the chapter of Isaiah from whence the passage is taken, to be satisfied that the prophet has in view Ahaz king of Judah. In fact, this prince is there represented as in consternation, on account of the arrival of Rezin and Pekah, kings of Syria and Israel, who, with their united armies, threatened his dominions. Isaiah encourages him, by representing that he still has forces sufficient; he promises him the assistance of the Lord, whom every prophet made always to be of his own party. To guarantee the truth of his promises, Isaiah tells his sovereign, that he has only to ask of him a sign. The dispirited prince replies, that he does not wish to tempt the Lord. The Prophet, however, wishing to convince him, announces a sign—"A young woman (says he) shall conceive, and bring forth a son, who shall be called Immanuel." Now the following chapter informs us who this young woman was: she was the wife of Isaiah himself.—"I took unto me (says he) faithful witnesses; and I went unto the propheteſs, and she conceived and bare a son." The simple inspection of this text, seems to carry the cause in favour of the incredulous, who maintain that this prophecy is in no respect applicable to Jesus. But theologists have the privilege of interpreting it in the manner most favourable to their own purposes, without reckoning on the suffrage of St. Matthew, who was divinely inspired, as the fathers of the Council of Nice have decided without appeal.

Proceeding forward in the perusal of Isaiah (chap. ix. 6), we find the following passage:—"Unto us a child is born (says the Prophet), and the government shall be upon his shoulders." If the child foretold by Isaiah was born in his time, it can no longer be said,

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that the Prophet meant to speak of Christ, who was born several centuries after him; for the birth of Jesus, being so distant, could not be a sign of deliverance to Ahaz, as his enemies pressed so closely upon him. Such are the objections of unbelievers. It is true, it is answered, that the prophets spoke of future events as if they were past or present. This answer requires only to be established by proof. It is likewise added, that the birth of Isaiah's son was only a type of that of Christ; for to him, it is affirmed, is applicable "the government on the shoulder," which is here spoken of; and in which our doctors perceive very distinctly pointed out the cross that Jesus carried on his shoulders when going to Calvary. Thus our interpreters have the happiness of seeing the sign of dominion, or empire, in what would appear, to eyes less enlightened, the sign of punishment, weakness, and slavery.

It is proper also to enquire how it comes to be said, that, in the Christian system, it is not at all necessary a prophecy have relation, in all its parts, to the subject or fact to which it is applied. The sacred writers do not mean to cite a whole prophecy, but only a passage, a detached phrase, or indeed often a single word, apposite to the subject they treat of, without troubling themselves whether what precedes or what follows their quotation, has connexion or not with what they are speaking of. In the example under discussion, St. Matthew, wishing to quote Isaiah, and apply a prophecy to Christ, takes of this prophecy these detached words only, *A virgin*, or a young woman, *shall conceive*, &c.—he stood in need of no more of it. According to that Evangelist, the Virgin Mary had conceived:—Isaiah had said, that a girl, or woman, should conceive.

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He therefore immediately concluded, that the conception of Jesus was foretold by Isaiah. This vague connection is sufficient for St. Matthew, and all Christians, who, like him, believe they see their founder pointed out in this prophecy.

Following this strange method, they have also advanced the authority of Isaiah to prove that Jesus was the Messiah promised to the Jews. In the 50th chapter this Prophet describes, in a very pathetic manner, the misfortunes and sufferings of his brother Jeremiah. They have long laboured to apply that prophecy to Christ; they have distinctly seen him pointed out in the "man of sorrows," of whom Isaiah here speaks;—so that it is regarded rather as a faithful and circumstantial narrative of the passion of Jesus, than as a prediction. But, in fact, sound criticism must acknowledge, that this history relates only to Jeremiah. Not to deprive themselves, however, of the resources so useful a passage might furnish, they have decided, that in the case of prophecies the *indirect relation* should have place. By this means, in admitting that the narrative of Isaiah had Jeremiah for its object, they have laid it down as a principle, that Jeremiah was a *figure* or *type* of Jesus. It is not that their lives have been strictly consentaneous; but, in the Christian religion, conformity followed by affinities, is not absolutely requisite to the justice of the comparison.

This manner of reasoning, peculiar to the Christian religion, has been very convenient for it. St. Paul especially, like most of the first preachers of Christianity, and after them the fathers and doctors of the church, have successfully employed this curious method of proving their system. According to them, all under the ancient law was the image of the new, and the most cele-

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brated personages in the Old Testament, typified prophetically Jesus Christ and his church. Abel, assassinated by his brother, was a prophetic figure of Jesus, put to death by the Jews. The sacrifice of Isaac, which was not accomplished, was the image of that accomplished on the cross. The relations or predictions which obviously had for their object Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, Jeremiah, Zorobabel, or other ancient personages, were applied to Christ. His death was represented by the blood of he goats and of bulls. By aid of these allegories, the ancient history of the Jews served only to announce the events in the life of Jesus, and the history of the establishment of his religion.—In this manner it is easy to find in the scriptures whatever we desire.

It would be useless to investigate the famous prophecy of the seventy weeks of Daniel, in which the Christian doctors believe they see the coming of Christ clearly announced. It is true, that if Daniel, or his editors, had taken the trouble to specify the nature of these *weeks*, they would have prevented much trouble to interpreters: this prediction might then have been a very great resource to Christianity. The ablest critics, however, declare, that they are very much embarrassed, when attempting to fix the commencement and the end of these seventy weeks. On this they are never unanimous, nor can they agree on a precise date, which hitherto is wanting to the great event of the coming of the Messiah. We know the Jews made use of weeks of days, weeks of weeks, and weeks of years. It is by a conjecture, merely hazarded, they advance in the Bible of Louvain, that the weeks mentioned in Daniel are weeks of years. Yet that supposition throws

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light on nothing, for the chronological table, which the doctors of Louvain have published, gives us only three hundred and forty-three years, intervening between the time when they make the weeks to commence, and the death of Jesus. Many critics have believed, that this prediction had been added afterwards to the text of Daniel, in favour of Jonathan Maccabeus. We may judge of the little credit that can be given to this prophecy of Daniel, from the prodigious number of commentaries that have been made on it.*

After this statement, and without dwelling longer on prophecies unintelligible even to those who adduce them as proofs, let us proceed to the life of Christ, and see if it is better adapted to confirm a Christian in his religion.

* The celebrated Anthony Collins composed two curious and profound works, wherein he demonstrates that none of the prophecies of the Old Testament can be *literally* applied to Jesus. On this subject we have also several able works by Jews, one of which has this title, *Liber Nizzachon Vetus*; another *Munimen Fidei*, which are to be found in the collection entitled *Tela Ignea Satanæ*, published by Wagenseil, in 4to. Altorf, 1681. The natural meaning of the Jewish prophecies may be found in a curious work of the Jew Isaac Orobio, the manuscript of which still exists: it is entitled "Israel Vindicated; or, the Natural Exposition of the Prophecies which Christians apply to Jesus."

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CHAPTER II.

OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST.

ALL the prophecies related in the sacred books, or spread abroad amongst the Jews, coincide in making them hope for the return of the favour of the Almighty. God had promised them a deliverer, a messenger, a *Messiah*, who should restore the power of Israel. That deliverer was to be of the seed of David, the prince *according to God's own heart*, so submissive to the priests, and so zealous for religion. It was, doubtless, to recompense the devotion and docility of this holy usurper, that the prophets and the priests, loaded with his kindness, promised him, in the name of heaven, that his family should reign for ever. If that famous prediction was clearly belied, during the Babylonish captivity, and the subsequent period, the Jews at this time, no less credulous than their ancestors, rested in expectation, and persuaded themselves, that it was impossible their prophets and diviners could, or intended to deceive them. They imagined that their oracles, sooner or later, would be accomplished, and that they should see a descendant of David restore the honour of their nation.

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It was to conform themselves to these predictions and popular notions, that the writers of the Gospels took care to give Christ a genealogy, by which they pretended to prove that he was descended in a direct line from David, and consequently, had a right, in virtue of his birth, to arrogate the character of Messiah. Nevertheless, criticism has exhausted itself on this genealogy. Such as are not possessed of faith, have been surprised to find, that the Holy Ghost has dictated it differently to the two evangelists who have detailed it: for, as has been so frequently remarked, the genealogy given by St. Matthew is not the same with that of St. Luke: a disparity which has thrown Christian interpreters into embarrassments, from which all their subtilty has hitherto been unable to rescue them. They tell us, that one of these genealogies is that of Joseph; but supposing Joseph to be of the race of David—a Christian cannot believe that he was the real father of Jesus, because his religion enjoins him to believe steadfastly, that Christ is the Son of God. Again, supposing these two discordant genealogies to be Mary's, in that case the Holy Ghost has blundered in one of them, and unbelievers will always have reason to lament the want of exactness in the writers he has deigned to inspire. In whatever way we consider them, one of the genealogies in the Gospel will always appear faulty and incomplete, and the extraction of Jesus will be very weakly established. It was, however, a point that merited some attention, seeing, in so far as concerns the Jews, it was evidently on his illustrious birth that the Messiah was to found his claims.

But whatever may be in this, let us examine the

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particulars which preceded and accompanied the birth of Christ. One evangelist alone has narrated them; all the others have superficially passed over circumstances as marvellous as they are important. St. Matthew, content with his genealogy, speaks but in few words of the preternatural manner wherein Jesus was formed in the womb of his mother. The speech of an angel, seen in a dream, suffices to convince Joseph of the virtue of his wife, and he adopts her child without any hesitation. St. Mark makes no mention of this memorable incident. St. John, who, by the assistance of his mystic and Platonic theology, could embellish that fact, or rather confound it, so as to shelter himself from the attacks of criticism, has not said one word about it. We are, therefore, constrained to satisfy ourselves with the materials St. Luke has transmitted us.

According to this evangelist, Elizabeth, kinswoman of Mary, and wife of a priest named Zachariah,* was in the sixth month of her pregnancy, "when the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city called Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his say-

* Some critics have drawn from this relationship of Elizabeth with Mary, a proof that the latter was not of the race of David. To espouse a priest, Elizabeth ought to have been of the tribe of Levi, and not of Judah, to which David belonged. St. Augustine says that, in his time, several works which he terms apocryphal, asserted that Mary was of the tribe of Levi. See *lib.* 23, *contra Faustum*, chap. 9.

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ing, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary; for thou hast found favour with God; And behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. Then said Mary to the angel, How shall this be, for I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. Thereafter (adds the text) the angel departed from her."

Now what is there in all this that is any way marvelous? Nothing indeed is more simple than this narrative. If the least reflection is employed on it, the wonderful will vanish; and we shall find the greatest care has been taken to spare the modesty of the young persons who might read this relation. An angel* enters the

* The quality of *angel*, which the evangelist gives to Gabriel, cannot perplex us. The difficulty hangs solely on the synonomy of the words, *Angel*, *God*, and *Man*. Jesus is sometimes called the Son of Man, and sometimes the Son of God. Judges, princes, and grandees, are called gods in several passages of scripture. Exod. xxii. last verse. Psalm xvii. 6. The patriarchs, and Moses, believed that God showed himself in visions; but St. Paul, in his epistle to the Hebrews ii. 2, assures us that it was only *angels*, and not God himself, who promulgated the law, and spoke to the holy patriarchs. Thus is God already reduced to be only an angel. In the New Testament, the doctors are called *angels*.—St. Matthew, Epist. to Galatians iv. 14, Rev. ii. &c. Here then are angels reduced to men. In short, the names of *gods*, *angels*, and *saints*, among the Jews, were merely titles which were given and taken, without attaching any consequence to

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house of Mary, whose husband was absent. He salutes her, that is, pays her a compliment, which may be translated as follows—"Good day, my dear Mary! you are indeed adorable—What attractions! what graces! of all women, you are the most lovely in my eyes. Your charms are pledges to you of my sincerity. Crown then my passion. Fear not the consequences of your complaisance; your husband is a simpleton; by visions and dreams we can make him believe whatever we desire. The good man will regard your pregnancy as the effect of a miracle of the Most High; he will adopt your child with joy, and all will go on in the best manner possible." Mary, charmed with these words, and little accustomed to receive the like compliments from her husband, replied, "Well! —I yield—I rely on your word and address; do with me as you please."

Nothing is more easy than to disengage the relation of St. Luke from the marvellous. The event of Mary's pregnancy follows in the order of nature, and if we substitute a young man in the place of the angel, the passage of the evangelist will have nothing incredible in it. In fact many have thought that the an-

them. This is confirmed by what Christ remarks in St. John x. 34, &c. To form a clear idea of the birth of Jesus, the reader should consult the story of brother Lucius, in the tales of "La Fontaine." According to the aprocryphal gospel of "the Nativity of Mary," which Father Jerome Xavier entirely adopts, Mary was consecrated to the Lord, and brought up in the temple, which she did not leave till sixteen years of age. This must create a suspicion that her pregnancy was the effect of some intrigue of the priests, who perhaps made her believe, that it was God who had begot a child on her.—*Codex Apocryph. N. T. p.* 19, *&c.*

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gel Gabriel was no other than a gallant, who, profiting by the absence of Joseph, found the secret to declare and gratify his passion.

We shall not stop to form conjectures on the true name and station of Mary's lover. The Jews, whose testimony on this subject may appear suspicious, assert, as we shall afterwards relate, that this favourite lover was a soldier;—*the military have always claims on the hearts of the ladies.* They add, that from his commerce with the wife of Joseph, the Messiah of the Christians sprung; that the discontented husband left his faithless wife, in order to retire to Babylon, and that Jesus with his mother went to Egypt, where he learned the trade of a conjurer, and afterwards returned to practise in Judea.*

Whether these histories, or, if they will, Rabbinical fables, be true or false, it is certain that the narrative of St. Luke, if not stripped of the marvellous, will always present insurmountable difficulties to the minds of the incredulous. They will ask, How God, being a pure spirit, could *overshadow a woman*, and excite in her all the movements necessary to the production of a child? They will ask, How the divine nature could unite with the nature of a woman? They will maintain, that the narrative is unworthy of the power and majesty of the Supreme Being, who did not stand in need of employing instruments as ridiculous as indecent, to operate the salvation of mankind. It will be thought, that the Almighty should have em-

* Such as are curious to see the history and fables which the Rabbis have made about Jesus, will find them in a Hebrew book translated into Latin under the title of *Toldes Jeshua*, inserted in the collection published by Wagenseil, to which we have already referred.

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ployed other means for conveying Jesus into the womb of his mother; he might have made him appear on the earth without needing to be incarnate in the belly of a woman;* but there must be wonders in romances, and especially in religious. It was in all ages supposed that great men were born in an extraordinary manner. Among the Heathens, Minerva sprung out of the brain of Jupiter; Bacchus was preserved in the

* Theologists have agitated the question, whether in the conception of Christ, the Virgin Mary *emiserit semen ?* According to *Tillemont*, tom. ii. p. 5, the Gnostics, who lived in the time of the apostles, denied even then that the Word was incarnate in the womb of the woman, and averred that it had taken a body only *in appearance*—a circumstance which must destroy the miracle of the resurrection. Basilides, in like manner, maintains that Jesus was not incarnate. Tillemont, tom. ii. p. 221. *St. Epiph., advers, hærat. Theodoret, hæretic. fab. lib. i. p.* 195. Lactantius, in order to establish that the spirit of God could impregnate a virgin, cites the example of the Thracian Mares, and other females, rendered prolific by the wind. Nothing is more indecent and ridiculous than the theological questions to which the birth of Jesus Christ has given rise. Some doctors, to preserve Mary's virginity, have maintained, that Jesus did not come into the world, like other men, *aperta vulva*, but rather *per vulvam clausam*. The celebrated John Scotus, on the contrary, regarded that opinion as very dangerous, as it would follow, that "Jesus Christ could not be born of the Virgin, but "merely had come out of her." A monk of Citeaux, called Ptolemy de Luques, affirmed that Jesus was engendered near the Virgin's heart, from three drops of her blood.—Bibliotheque Angloise, tome ii. p. 354–5. The great St. Thomas Aquinas has examined, whether Jesus Christ could not have been an *hermaphrodite ?* and whether he could not have been of the *feminine gender ?* Others have agitated the question, "Whether Jesus could have been incarnate in a cow?" We may therefore see, how one absurdity may engender others, in the prolific minds of theologists.

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thigh of the same god. Among the Chinese, the god Fo was generated by a virgin, rendered prolific by a ray of the sun. With Christians, Jesus is born of a virgin, impregnated by the operation of the Holy Ghost, and she remains a virgin after that operation! Incapable of elevating themselves to God, men have made him descend to their own nature; such is the origin of all incarnations, the belief of which is spread throughout the world.

All the wonders, however, which precede the birth of Jesus, are terminated by a very natural occurrence. At the end of nine months his mother is delivered like all other women; and after so many incredible and supernatural events, the Son of God comes into the world like all other people's children. This conformity in birth, will ever occasion the surmise of a conformity in the physical causes which produced the son of Mary. Indeed, the supernatural only can produce the supernatural; from material agents result physical effects; and they maintain in the schools, that there must always be a parity of nature between cause and effect.

Though, according to Christians, Jesus was at one and the same time man and God, persons hard of belief will say, it was necessary that the divine germ brought from heaven, to be deposited in the womb of Mary, should contain at the same time both divinity and body, to become Son of God. To use the language of theologists, the *hypostatic union* of the two natures in Christ must have taken place before his birth, and immixed in the womb of his mother. In that case, we cannot conceive how it could happen, that the divine nature should continue torpid and inactive during the whole time of Mary's pregnancy, in so much that she

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herself had not even been warned of the time of her inlying. The proof of this we find in St. Luke, chap. ii.—" In those days (says he) there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. And as all went to be taxed, every one out of his own city, Joseph also went out of Nazareth ——— and came to Bethlehem, to be taxed with Mary, who was great with child. And so it was, that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered, and she brought forth her first born son, and wrapt him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

This narrative proves that Mary was taken unprovided, and that the Holy Ghost, who had done so many things for her, had neglected to warn her of an event so likely to interest him, and so important to all mankind. The humanity of Jesus being subject to every casualty in our nature, might have perished in this journey, undertaken at a time very critical to his mother. In fine, we do not understand how the mother could remain in complete ignorance of the proximity of her time, and how the Eternal could so abandon the precious child he had deposited in her womb.

Some other circumstances of the relation of St. Luke present new difficulties. He speaks of a *taxing* (enumeration) by order of Cæsar Augustus:—a fact of which no mention is made by any historian, Jewish or profane.* We are also astonished to find

* We may also add, that St. Luke asserts, this pretended taxing was made under Quirinus or Cyreneus; but it has been demonstrated, that Quintilius Varus was at the time governor of

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the son of God born in poverty, having no other asylum than a stable, and no other cradle than a manger; and at the tenderest age, in a rigorous season, exposed to miseries without number.

It is true, our theologists have found a way to answer all these difficulties. They maintain, that a just God, wishing to appease himself, destined, from the beginning, his innocent son to afflictions, in order to have a motive for pardoning the guilty human race, which had become hateful to him through Adam's transgression, in which, however, his descendants had no share.* By an act of justice, whereof the mind of

the province. Christian preachers and scribes remark with delight, that the temple of Janus was shut, and that a profound peace reigned throughout the whole world at the time of Christ's birth; but the falsehood of this fact has been proved in a book published in 1700. See *Bernard, Nouvelles de la Republique des Lettres*, tome 15.

* After all, it appears, from the account of the creation ascribed to Moses, that the human race are not all the descendants of Adam; consequently they cannot be held partakers of his guilt. In the first chapter of Genesis, God is said to have created man out of *nothing*. In the second chapter, Adam is represented as having been formed *of the clay of the earth*. No restrictions whatever as to what they should eat, were imposed on the men who were created of nothing. "Behold (said God to them) I have given you every herb bearing seed upon earth, and all trees which have in them seed according to their kind, that it may be to you for meat." To Adam, however, he said: "Thou mayest eat of every tree in the garden; but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil *thou shalt not eat*, for in the day thou eatest of it thou shalt die the death." In the first creation, man and woman were formed *at the same moment*, and the sexes distinguished by the terms *male* and *female*. But it was not till *after* a proper helper could not be found for Adam among the first creation, that God said, "Let us make a helper

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man can form no idea, a God, whose essence renders him incapable of commiting sin, is loaded with the iniquities of man, and must expiate them in order to disarm the indignation of a father he has not offended. Such are the inconceivable principles which serve for the basis of the Christian theology.*

Our doctors add—It was the will of God that the birth of his Son should be accompanied with the same accidents as that of other men, *to console* the latter for the misfortunes attendant on their existence. Man, say they, is guilty before he is born, because all children are bound to pay the debts of their fathers :— thus man suffers justly as a sinner himself, and as charged with the sin of his first father. Granting this, what more consolatory to us than seeing a God, innocence and holiness itself, suffering in a stable all the evils attached to indigence ! That consolation would have been wanting to men, if God had ordained that his

like unto himself—and God sent a deep sleep upon Adam, and when he had slept, God took one of his ribs, and filled up the flesh for it." Of this rib a companion was made for Adam, which, of himself, he called *a woman*. These two distinct creations prove fatal to the dogma, that Christ died for *all* men. His death cannot be beneficial to those who are not the descendants of Adam, because, unless he is acknowledged the father of all mankind, his transgression cannot be imputed to the whole human race. It must therefore be confined to the Jews only, which clears the Gentiles of the sin of Adam, and also of the necessity of an atonement for guilt, in which they could not possibly participate. We are at a loss to know, by what ingenuity our Christian doctors will attempt to get rid of this difficulty.

* The sacrifice of the Son of God is mentioned as a proof of his benevolence. Is it not rather a proof of his ferocity, cruelty, and implacable vengeance? A good Christian on his death bed said, " he had never been able to conceive how a *good* God could put an *innocent* God to death to appease a *just* God."

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Son should be born in splendour, and an abundance of the comforts of life. If the innocent Jesus had not suffered, mankind, incapable of extinguishing a debt contracted by Adam, would have been for ever excluded from Paradise. As to the painful journey Mary was obliged to undertake in such critical circumstances, this occurrence had been foreseen by eternal wisdom, which had resolved, that Christ should be born at Bethlehem, and not at Nazareth. It was necessary—having been foretold, it behoved to be accomplished.

However solid these answers may appear to the faithful, they are not capable of convincing the incredulous. Unbelievers exclaim against the injustice of making a most innocent God suffer, and loading him with the iniquities of the earth; neither can they conceive, by what principle of equity the Supreme Being could make the human race responsible for a fault committed by their first parents, without their knowledge and participation? They maintain, that, in fair justice, children have a right to renounce the succession of their parents, when they have to pay out of the estate debts which the latter have contracted. The incredulous remark, that the conduct attributed to God by the Christian mythology, is injurious to him, in so far as it represents him as the most implacable, the most cruel, and the most unjust of tyrants.* Finally, they contend that it would have been wiser to have hindered man from committing sin than to permit him to sin, and make his own Son die to expiate man's iniquity.

With respect to the journey to Bethlehem, we cannot discover the necessity of it. The place where the Saviour of the world was to be born, seems a circumstance perfectly indifferent to the salvation of man-

* See Appendix, No. I.

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kind. As for the prophecy announcing the glory of Bethlehem, in having given existence to the "Leader of Israel"—it does not appear to agree with Jesus, who was born there in a stable, and who was rejected by the people whose leader he was to be. It is only a pious straining that can make this prediction apply to Christ. We are indeed assured, that it had been foretold Jesus was to be born in poverty; while, on the other hand, the Messiah of the Jews is generally announced by the prophets as a prince, a hero, and a conqueror. It is necessary then to know which of these prophecies we ought to adopt. Our doctors, will not fail to tell us, "the predictions announcing that Jesus would be born and live in indigence and meanness, ought to be taken *literally*, and those which announce his power and glory ought to be taken *allegorically*." But this solution will not satisfy the incredulous; they will affirm, that employing this manner of explanation, they will always find in the sacred writings whatever they may think they stand in need of. They will conclude, that the scripture is to Christians what the clouds are to the man, who imagines he perceives in them whatever figures he pleases.*

* The *proto-gospel*, ascribed to St. James, relates some curious and ridiculous circumstances, on which none of our four canonical evangelists have wished to rely; yet they have nothing revolting to persons who possess faith enough. This proto-gospel informs us, for example, of the ill humour of Joseph on seeing his wife pregnant, and the reproaches he loaded her with on account of her lewdness, unworthy, according to it, of a virgin reared under the eyes of priests. Mary excuses herself with tears; she protests her innocence, and "swears in the name of the living God, that she is ignorant

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from whence the child has come to her." It appears, that in her distress, she had forgot the adventure of Gabriel:—that angel came the night following to encourage by a dream poor Joseph, who, on his part, was on the point of having an affair with the priests, who accused him of having palmed this child, to the prejudice of Mary's vow of virginity. On this the priests made the two spouses drink *of the waters of jealousy*, that is, of a potion, which, by a miracle, did them no injury; the high priest, therefore, declared them most innocent.

It is likewise related in the same gospel, that after Mary had been delivered, *Salome*, refusing to credit the midwife who assured her that the delivered was still a virgin, laid her hand on Mary in order to satisfy herself of the fact. Immediately this rash hand felt itself on fire; but she was cured on taking the little Jesus in her arms. See *Codex Apocr.* N. T. tome i. p. 95—113.

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CHAPTER III.

ADORATION OF THE MAGI AND SHEPHERDS—MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS;—AND OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES, WHICH FOLLOWED THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST.

OF the four historians of Jesus adopted by the church, two are wholly silent on the facts we are to relate in this chapter; and St. Matthew and St. Luke who have transmitted them, are not at all unanimous in particulars. So discordant indeed are their relations, that the ablest commentators do not know how to reconcile them. These differences, it is true, are less perceptible when the Evangelists are read the one after the other, or without reflection; but they become particularly striking, when we take the trouble of comparing them. This is undoubtedly the reason why we have hitherto had no concordance of the gospels, which received the general approbation of the church. Even those which have been printed, have not been universally adopted, though it must be acknowledged that they contain nothing contrary to faith. It is perhaps from judicious policy, that the heads of the church have not approved of any system on this point; they have probably felt the impossibility of reconciling narratives so discordant as those of the four Evangelists; for the

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Holy Ghost, doubtless with a view to exercise the faith of the faithful, has inspired them very differently. Besides, an able concordance of the Gospels would prove a very dangerous work:—it would necessarily bring together facts related by authors, who, very far from supporting, would only reciprocally weaken each other—a circumstance which could not fail to stagger at least the faith of the compiler.

St. Matthew, who, according to common opinion, wrote the first history of Jesus, asserts, that as soon as Christ was born, and while he was still in the stable at Bethlehem, Magi came from the East to Jerusalem, and enquired where the king of the Jews was, whose star they had observed in their own country. Herod, who then reigned in Judea, being informed of the motive of their journey, consulted the people of the law; and having learned that Christ was to be born at Bethlehem, he permitted the Magi to go there, recommending to them to inform themselves exactly of this child, that he himself might do him homage.*

It appears, from the narrative of St. Matthew, that as soon as the Magi left Herod, they took the road to Bethlehem, a place not far from Jerusalem. It is surprising that this prince, alarmed at the arrival of the Magi, who had thus announced the birth of a king of the Jews, did not take more precaution to allay his own uneasiness, and that of the capital, which the gospel represents as in a state of consternation at this grand event. It would have been very easy for him to have satisfied himself of the fact, without being under the necessity of relying on strangers, who did not exe-

* St. Matthew ii. 2. &c.

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cute his commission. The Magi did not return: Joseph had time to save himself and his little family by flight; Herod remained tranquil in spite of his suspicions and fears. It was not till after a considerable interval that he got into a passion on finding himself deceived; and then, to preserve his crown in safety, he ordered a general massacre of the children of Bethlehem and the neighbouring villages! But why suppose such conduct in a sovereign, jealous, distrustful, and cruel? This prince had assembled the doctors of the law and principal men of the nation; their advice had confirmed the rumour spread by the wise men; they said it was at Bethlehem that Christ was to be born, and yet Herod did nothing for his own tranquillity! Either Herod had faith in the prophecies of the Jews, or he did not believe them. In the first case, and instead of relying on strangers, he ought himself to have gone, with all his court, to Bethlehem, and paid homage to the Saviour of the nation. In the second case, it is absurd to make Herod order a general massacre of infants, on account of a suspicion founded on a prophecy which he did not believe.

Neither do we find that this prince's indignation was roused till after the lapse of several days, and after he perceived that the Magi derided him, and returned by another road. Why did he not learn by the same means, the flight of Jesus, of Joseph, and his mother? Their retreat must certainly have been observed in a place so small as Bethlehem. It will perhaps be said, that God on this occasion, permitted Herod to be blinded; but God should not have permitted the inhabitants of Bethlehem and its environs to be so obstinate in preserving a secret that was to cost the lives of all their children. Possessed of the power of working mira-

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cles; could not God have saved his son by more gentle means than the useless massacre of a great number of innocents?—On the other hand, Herod was not absolute master in Judea. The Romans would not have permitted him to exercise such cruelties; and the Jewish nation, persuaded of the birth of Christ, would not have been accessary to them. A King of England, more absolute than a petty sovereign of Judea, dependent on the Romans, would not be obeyed, were he to order his guards to go and cut the throats of all the children in a neighbouring village, because three strangers, in passing through London, had said to him, that among the infants born in that village there was one, who, according to the rules of judicial astrology, was destined to be one day king of Great Britain. At the time when astrology was in vogue, they would have contented themselves with causing search to be made for the suspected infant; they would have kept it in solitary confinement, or perhaps put it to death; but without comprehending other innocent children in its proscription.

We might indeed oppose to the relation of Matthew the silence of the other evangelists, and especially that of the historian Josephus, who, having reasons to hate Herod, would not have failed to relate a fact so likely to render him odious as the massacre of the innocents. Philo is likewise silent on the subject; and no reason can be divined why these two celebrated historians should have agreed in concealing a fact so horrible. We cannot suppose it has proceeded from hatred to the Christian religion; for that detached fact would prove neither for nor against it. We are, therefore, warranted to conclude that this massacre is a fable; and that Matthew seems to have in-

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vented it merely to have the opportunity of applying an ancient prophecy, which was his predominant taste. But in this instance he has obviously deceived himself. The prophecy which he applies to the massacre of the innocents, is taken from Jeremiah. All the Jews understood it as relating to the Babylonish captivity. It is conceived as follows: "The Lord hath said, the voice of lamentations, groanings, and bitter tears, has been heard from on high of Rachael, who weeped for her children, and refused to be comforted for them, because they were not."—The following verse is so plain, that it is inconceivable why Matthew has ventured to apply it to the pretended massacre at Bethlehem:—"Thus saith the Lord (continues Jeremiah), refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears; for thy work shall be rewarded, and thy children shall come again from the land of the enemy." Their return from the captivity is here clearly pointed out, when the Israelites should again plant vines after obtaining possession of their own country.

It is also to accomplish a prophecy, that the same St. Matthew makes Jesus travel into Egypt. This journey, or rather Christ's return, had, according to him, been predicted by Hosea in these words: "Out of Egypt have I called my son." But it is evident, that this passage is to be considered only as relating to the deliverance of the Israelites from bondage, through the ministry of Moses. Besides, the journey and abode of Jesus in Egypt, do not agree in any manner with some circumstances which happened in the infancy of Christ, as related by St. Luke, who informs us, that at the end of eight days Jesus was circumcised. The time of Mary's purification being accomplished, according to the law of Moses, Joseph and

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his mother carried Christ to Jerusalem, in order to present him to the Lord, agreeably to the law which ordained the consecrating to him the first born (first fruits), and offering a sacrifice for them. On this occasion, Luke tells us, that old Simeon took the infant in his arms, and declared in the presence of all the people assisting at the ceremony, that the child was the Saviour of Israel. An old prophetess, called Anna, bore aloud the same testimony in his favour, and spoke of him to all those who looked for the redemption of the Jews. But why were speeches thus publicly made in the temple of Jerusalem, in which city Herod resided, unknown to a prince so suspicious? They were much better calculated to excite his uneasiness, and awake his jealousy, than the arrival of astrologers from the East.

Did Joseph and Mary, who came to Jerusalem for the presentation of Jesus, and purification of his mother, return to Bethlehem? and went they from thence into Egypt in place of going to Nazareth? St. Luke says indeed, most expressly, that when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. But in what time did the parents of Jesus accomplish all that the law ordained? Was it before going into Egypt, or after their return from that country, where, according to St. Matthew, they had taken refuge to shelter themselves from the cruelty of Herod? In a word, did the purification of the virgin, and the presentation of her son in the temple, take place before or after the death of that wicked prince? According to Leviticus, the purification of a mother who had brought a son into the world, was to be made at the end of thirty days. Hence we see how very difficult it is to

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reconcile the flight into Egypt, and the massacre of the innocents, which St. Matthew relates, with the narrative of St. Luke, who says, that, "after having performed the ordinances of the law, Joseph and Mary returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth;" and then adds, "they went to Jerusalem every year to celebrate the passover." If we could adopt the relation of the two evangelists, at what time are we to place the coming of the Magi from the East in order to adore Christ; the anger of Herod; the flight into Egypt; and the massacre of the innocents? We are forced to conclude, either that the relation of St. Luke is defective, or that St. Matthew wished to deceive his readers with improbable tales. In whatever way we consider the matter, the Holy Ghost, who inspired these apostles, will in either case be found to have committed a mistake.

There is another fact on which our two evangelists do not better agree. St. Matthew, as we have seen, makes the Magi come to Bethlehem from the extremity of the East, to adore the child Jesus, and offer him presents. St. Luke, less taken with the marvellous, makes this child be adored by simple shepherds, who watched their flocks during night, and to whom an angel announced the great event of the birth of the Saviour of Israel. The latter evangelist speaks neither of the apparition of the star, nor of the coming of the Magi, nor of the cruelty of Herod—circumstances, however, which ought to have been recorded by St. Luke, who informs us that he was so exactly informed of every thing concerning Jesus.

Whatever may be in this, the parents of Christ, either after their return from Egypt, or after his presentation in the temple, went to reside at Nazareth,

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St. Matthew, as usual, perceives in this the accomplishment of the prediction, *he shall be called a Nazarene*; but unfortunately for his purpose, this prophecy is not to be found in the Bible, nor can it be divined by whom it was uttered. It is however certain, that *Nazarene* among the Jews, signified a *vagabond*, a person excluded from the rest of the world; that Nazareth was a very pitiful town, inhabited by beings so wretched that their poverty had become proverbial; and that beggars, vagrants, and people whom nobody would own, were called *Nazarenes*.*

* It is of importance to remark, that the first Christians were styled *Nazarenes*. We find them also designed *Ebionites*, derived from a Hebrew word which signifies a *mendicant*, a *wretch*, and a *pauper*. Every body knows that St. Francis and St. Dominic, who, in the 13th century, proposed to revive primitive Christianity, founded orders of mendicant monks, destined to live solely on alms, to be true *Nazarenes*, and to levy contributions on the community, which these vagabonds have never ceased to oppress. Salmeron, in order to re-animate these mendicant monks, has maintained that Jesus Christ himself was a beggar. Be that as it may, it is not unseasonable here to make some remarks on the Nazarenes, which will throw great light on the history of Christianity. It is well known, that the name of Nazarenes was given to the apostles and Jews, who were first converted. The Jews regarded them as heretics (minian), and excommunicated persons; and, according to St. Jerome, anathematised them in all their synagogues, under the name of Nazarenes. *St. Hieronym. Epist. ad ib. in Isaiam.* v. 18. The Jews even at present give the name of Nazarenes (Nozerim) to the Christians, whom the Arabs and Persians call Nazari. The first Jews, converted by Jesus and his apostles, were only some reformed Jews: they preserved circumcision and other usages appointed by the law of Moses. "Nazaræi (says St. Jerome), ita Christum recipiunt, ut observationes legis veteris non amittant, Ad. Jes. 8." In this they followed the example of Jesus, who being circumcised, and a Jew during his whole life, had often taught, that it was ne-

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We have seen, in the course of this chapter, how little harmony exists between the two evangelists, respecting the circumstances attending the birth of Jesus. Let us now examine what could have been the views of these two writers in relating these facts so very differently.

It is at least impossible that Jesus, as St. Luke relates, could constantly reside at Nazareth till he was twelve years of age, if it be true that he was carried soon after his birth into Egypt, where St. Matthew

cessary to respect and observe the law. Yet in process of time the Nazarenes, or Ebionites, were anathematised by the other Christians, for having united the ceremonies of the law with the gospel of Christ. St. Jerome, speaking of them and the disciples of Corinthus, says, "Qui (Ebioni et Cerinthieni) credentes in Christo, propter hoc solum a patribus anathematizati sunt, quod legis ceremonias Christi evangelio miscuerunt. Sic nova confessi sunt, ut vetera non amitterent. St. Hieron. in Epistol ad Augustin." It seems, that in acting thus, the Ebionites, or Nazarenes, conformed themselves to the intentions of Jesus and his apostles. It is, therefore, surprising to see them treated afterwards as heretics. But we will see (in chap. 17.) the true cause of this change; it was evidently owing to St. Paul, whose party prevailed over that of St. Peter, the other apostles, and the Nazarenes or Judaising Christians. Thus St. Paul corrected and reformed the system of Jesus Christ, who had preached only a Judaism reformed. The apostle of the Gentiles succeeded in making his master, and his old comrades, be regarded as heretics, or bad Christians. Thus it is, that theologists frequently take the liberty of rectifying the religion of the Saviour they adore! Moreover, the Nazarenes had a gospel in Hebrew very different from the one we possess, and which was attributed to St. Barnabas. See Toland, in a work published under the title of NAZARENES, in octavo, London, 1718. According to that gospel, the Nazarenes did not believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ.

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makes him remain until the death of Herod. Even in the time that Jesus lived, he was upbraided with his stay in Egypt.* His enemies averred that he there learned magic, to which they attributed the wonders, or cunning tricks, they saw him perform. St. Luke, to do away these accusations, has thought proper to be silent as to the journey to Egypt, which made his hero suspected. He fixes him, therefore, at Nazareth, and makes him go every year with his parents to Jerusalem. But the precaution of that evangelist seems to have been useless. St. Matthew, who wrote before him, had established the journey and abode of Jesus in Egypt. Origen, in his dispute with Celsus, does not deny it. Hence we see, that the Christian doctors did not doubt that Jesus had been in that country, notwithstanding the silence of St. Luke. Let us endeavour then to develope the motives of these two writers.

The Jews in general agreed in the expectation of a Messiah or Deliverer; but as the different orders of the state had their prophets, they also possessed different signs by which they were to know the Messiah. The great, the rich, and persons well informed, did not surely expect that the deliverer of Israel should be born in a stable, and sprung from the dregs of the people. They undoubtedly expected their deliverance by a prince, a warrior, a man of power, able to make himself respected by the nations inimical to Judea, and

* The gospel of the infancy of Jesus Christ, ascribed to the apostle St. Thomas, makes the holy family travel into Egypt, and makes Jesus go from city to city, working miracles sufficient to procure them a comfortable subsistence. The water Mary used in washing her child, cured lepers, and persons possessed with devils; the presence of Christ made the idols fall down, &c.—Codex Apoc. tome 1. p. 182.

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to break in pieces their chains. The poor, on the contrary, who, as well as the great and the rich, have their portion of self love, thought they might flatter themselves that the Messiah would be born in their class. Their nation and their neighbours furnished many examples of great men sprung from the bosom of poverty; and the oracles with which this nation was fed were of such a nature, that every family believed itself entitled to aspire to the honour of giving birth to a Messiah; though the most general opinion was, that this deliverer was to come of the race of David.

Admitting this, shepherds and people of the lowest order might readily believe, that a woman, delivered in a stable at Bethlehem, had brought the Christ into the world. It may likwise be presumed, that Mary, with a view to render herself interesting, said to those who visited her, that she was descended from the blood of kings—a pretension well adapted to excite the commiseration and wonderment of the people. This secret, and the confused remembrance of some prophecies about Bethlehem, the native country of David, were sufficient to operate on the imaginations of these credulous people, little scrupulous about proofs of what was told them.

St. Matthew, who reckoned on the credulity of his readers,* had his head full of prophecies and popular

* Men are always as credulous as children upon religious subjects. As they comprehend nothing about it, and are nevertheless told that they must believe it, they imagine they run no risk in joining sentiments with the priests, whom they suppose to have succeeded in discovering that which they do not understand. The most rational people ask themselves, "What shall we do?—what interest can so many people have to deceive?" To these we say, they do deceive you, either because they are

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notions. To fill up a blank of thirty years in his history of Jesus, he contrived to make him travel into Egypt, without foreseeing the objections that might be made on account of the neglect of the holy family to fulfil the ordinances of the law; such as the circumcision of the child, his presentation in the temple, the purification of his mother, and the celebration of the passover—ceremonies which could only be performed at Jerusalem. Perhaps it is to justify the journey to Egypt, and those negligences, that St. Matthew introduces the prophecy of Hosea relative to the return from that place. It seems also to justify the duration of Jesus's abode there, that he relates the wrath of Herod, and the fable of the massacre of the innocents, which he makes that prince order, though his crimes had, in other respects, rendered him sufficiently odious to the Jews as well as to strangers. Mankind in general are disposed to believe every thing of a man become famous for his wickedness.

St. Luke, to elude the reproaches which in his time might be thrown on Jesus, on account of his residence and journey in Egypt, has not mentioned it at all; but his silence does not destroy its reality. It was necessary, to free Christ from the suspicion of magic,

themselves deceived, or because they have a great interest in deceiving you.—MIRABAUD.

Credulity, says Helvetius, is partly the effect of indolence. We have been habituated to believe a thing that is absurd; the falsity of such a belief is suspected; but to be fully satisfied requires the fatigue of examination. This we are not for undergoing; and thus choose rather to believe than examine. In such disposition, the most convincing proof of the falsity of an opinion will always appear insufficient. Every weak reasoning persuades; every ridiculous story is believed.

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but he has not cleared him of accusations brought against his birth, which are quite as weighty.

Celsus, a celebrated physician, who lived in the second century of Christianity, and who had carefully collected all which had been published against Christ, asserts that he was the fruit of adultery. Origen, in his work against Celsus, has preserved this accusation, but he has not transmitted the proofs on which it was founded. Unbelievers, however, have endeavoured to supply them, and found the opinion of Celsus on what follows :—

First. From the testimony of St. Matthew himself, it is most certain that Joseph was very much dissatisfied with the pregnancy of his wife, in which he had no part. He formed the design of quitting her secretly, and without noise; a resolution from which he was diverted by an angel, or dream, or perhaps reflection, which always passes among Jews for the effect of an inspiration from on high. It appears, however, that this design of Joseph had transpired, and was afterwards turned into a matter of reproach against Jesus. But St. Luke, more prudent than St. Matthew, has not ventured to mention either the ill humour of Joseph, or the good-natured conduct he followed. Neither do we find, though he formed this resolution as to his wife's amour, that this easy man again appeared on the stage from the time Jesus entered on it. We are no where informed of his death, and it is obvious that he never afterwards beheld his putative son with an eye of kindness.* When, at thirty years

* St. Epiphanius, lib. i. 10. of Heresie, assures us, that Joseph was very old at the time of his marriage with the virgin; and adds, that he was a widower, and father of six children by

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of age, Jesus and his mother went to the wedding at Cana, there is no mention of Joseph. If we admit, with St. Luke, the history of Jesus's dispute with the doctors in the temple of Jerusalem, we will find a new proof of the indifference which reigned between the pretended father and supposed son: they met at the end of three days, and deigned not to interchange a word.

Secondly. If to these presumptions are joined testimonies more positive, and a high antiquity, which confirm the suspicions entertained concerning the birth of Jesus, we will obtain proofs that must convince every unprejudiced person. The Emperor Julian, as well as Celsus, who both had carefully examined all the writings existing in their time, for and against the Christian religion and its author, represent the mother of Jesus as a prostitute, living by her debaucheries, and turned off by her betrothed. From the beginning of Christianity, the sect of Antidicomarites regarded Jesus as a bastard. In the works of the Jews, he is treated as an adulterous child; and, almost in our days, Helvidius, a learned Protestant critic, as well as several others, have maintained, not only that Jesus was the fruit of a criminal intercourse, but also that Mary, repudiated by Joseph, had other children by different husbands. Besides, this supposed virgin did not want a reason for forsaking Joseph, and flying into Egypt with her son. A prevailing tradition among the Jews states,

his first wife. According to the *proto-gospel* ascribed to St. James the Young, the good man had much difficulty in prevailing on himself to espouse Mary, whose age intimidated him; but the high priest convinced him, finding perhaps that Joseph was the man most conformable to his views. Codex. Apocryph. N. T. tome i. p. 88, &c. This seems to insinuate a sacerdotal intrigue.

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that she made this journey to shelter herself from the pursuit of her spouse, who, in spite of the nocturnal visions which had been employed to pacify him, might have delivered her up to the rigour of the laws. We know that the Hebrews did not understand jesting on this subject.

We also find in the *Talmud** the name of Panther, surnamed *Bar-Panther*, whom they reckon in the number of the gallants, or husbands of the Virgin. From thence it would appear, that Mary, repudiated by Joseph, or after her flight, espoused Panther, an Egyptian soldier, her favourite lover, and the real father of Jesus. St. John Damascene thought to repair the injury which this anecdote might do to Mary's reputation, by saying that the name of *Bar-Panther* was hereditary in the family of Mary, and consequently in that of Joseph. But, 1st, either Mary was not the kinswoman of Joseph, or she was not the cousin of

* In a work, published during the present year, by Soloman Bennet, a Polish Jew, entitled "The Constancy of Israel," we find the following account of the Talmud:—This extensive work is a commentary on the Bible and the Mishnah; the contents thereof include all the juridical, criminal, ritual, conjugal, and agricultural laws at large. It was produced by means of correspondence among the different colleges, established in places where the Jews were dispersed, by way of polemical questions, controversies, and debates. It contains also moral philosophy, ethics, and various allegorical phrases. All these doctrines were collected into one work, which bears the title of the 'Talmud;' which was concluded by Rabinan Saboroy, who succeeded Rabina, and Rabbi Ashah, the chief doctors in Assyria, and the first promoters of the Talmud. They produced also some branches of the sciences, as mathematics, astronomy, and chronology; all of which were concluded in the year of the Creation 4260, and according to the Christian era 500 years.

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Elizabeth, who was married to a priest, and therefore of the tribe of Levi.—2dly, We no where find in the Bible the name of *Panther* among the descendants of David. If this had been an hereditary surname in that family, it would be found somewhere, unless we suppose that John Damascene has learned it by a particular revelation. 3dly, The name of *Panther* is by no means Hebrew.

It will perhaps be said, that these rumours, so injurious to Jesus and his mother, are calumnies invented by the enemies of the Christian religion. But why decide, if the pleas of both parties are not investigated? The imputations are very ancient; they have been advanced against Christians ever since the origin of their religion; and they have never satisfactorily refuted them. In the time of Jesus, we find that his contemporaries regarded his wonders as the effects of magic, the delusions of the devil, the consequences of the power of Beelzebub, or slight of hand tricks.* In particular, the relations of Jesus were of that opinion, and regarded him as an impostor—a circumstance stated in the Gospel itself, where we shall afterwards find that they wanted to arrest him. On the other

* We can oppose to the miracles of Moses and Christ, those performed by Mahomet, in presence of all Mecca and Arabia assembled! The effect of the prophet's miracles was at least to convince the Arabians, that he was a divine person. The miracles of Jesus convinced nobody of his mission. St. Paul himself, who afterwards became the most ardent of his disciples, was not convinced by the miracles, of which, in his time, there existed so many witnesses; a new one was necessary for his conversion. By what right then do they, at this day, demand belief of miracles, which could not convince even in the time of the apostles, only a short time after they were wrought?

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hand, Jesus never speaks of his infancy, nor of the time that had preceded his preaching. There is every reason to believe, he did not love to recur to circumstances dishonourable to his mother; towards whom indeed we shall very soon find him failing in filial respect.

The evangelists, in like manner, pass very slightly over the first years of their hero's life. St. Matthew makes him return from Egypt on the death of Herod, without mentioning in what year that happened. He thus leaves his commentators in an embarrassment, as to whether Jesus was then two or ten years old. We find indeed, that the term of ten years is, through complaisance, invented on account of the dispute between him and the doctors of Jerusalem, which St. Luke places at his twelfth year. This excepted, Jesus disappeared from the scene, not to shew himself again till thirty years of age.*

It is difficult to discover what he did until that age. If we credit St. Luke, he remained at Nazareth. Yet there is reason to believe that he was somewhere else, for the purpose of learning the part which he was afterwards to play. If he had always resided at Nazareth, the inhabitants of that small town would have known him perfectly. Very far from this;—they are surprised at seeing him, when thirty years of age. They only conjecture that they knew him; and ask each other, "Is not this the son of Joseph?"—a question very

* Jesus perhaps passed a considerable part of his life among the contemplative *Essenians* or *Therapeutes*, who were a kind of very enthusiastic Jewish monks, living in the vicinity of Alexandria in Egypt, where it appears he drew up his severe and truly monastic doctrine. See chap. xvii. of this work.

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ridiculous in the mouth of persons who must have been in the constant habit of seeing Jesus in the narrow compass of their town. This does not hinder St. Justin from telling us, that he became a carpenter in the workshop of his pretended father, and that he wrought at buildings or instruments of husbandry.* But such a profession could not long agree with a man in whom we find an ambitious and restless mind.

It will be better, therefore, here to quit St. Luke, in order to follow St. Matthew, who places the baptism of John after the return from Egypt, and makes Jesus forthwith commence his mission. It is also, to speak properly, at this epoch we ought to begin the life of Christ. Yet, to let nothing be lost to the reader of the evangelical memoirs, the subject of our literary labours, we thought it our duty not to pass over in silence the circumstances which have been noticed, as these preliminaries are calculated to throw much light on the person and actions of Jesus. Besides, the interval between the birth and preaching of Christ has not been the part of his history least exposed to the shafts of criticism. St. Matthew, as we have seen, to

* St. Justin Martyr contra Tryphon. The gospel of the infancy informs us, that Jesus, when young, amused himself with forming small birds of clay, which he afterwards animated, and then they flew into the air. The same book says, that he knew more than his schoolmaster, whom he killed for having struck him, because Jesus refused to read the letters of the alphabet. We find also, that Jesus assisted Joseph in his labours, and by a miracle lengthened the pieces of wood, when cut too short or too narrow. All these extravagancies are not more difficult to believe than many other wonders related in the acknowledged gospels. Codex. Apocryph. N. T. tome i. p. 198, &c. and III. p. 424–441.

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account for his master's absence during the thirty years, makes him go into Egypt, and return in an unlimited time. St. Luke, who digested his memoirs after Matthew, perceiving that the abode in Egypt cast a suspicion of magic on the miracles of Jesus, makes him remain in Galilee, going and coming every year to Jerusalem; and fixes his abode in the country, by making him appear, at the age of twelve, in the capital, in the midst of the doctors, and debating with them. But St. Mark and St. John, profiting by the criticism which these different arrangements had experienced, make the Messiah drop from the clouds, and put him instantly to labour at the great work of the salvation of mankind.

It is thus that, on combining and comparing the several relations, we are enabled to discover the true system of the Gospels, in which, without adopting any alterations, we will find materials for composing the life of Jesus, by merely reducing the marvellous to its proper value.

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CHAPTER IV.

BAPTISM OF JESUS CHRIST—HIS ABODE IN THE DESERT—COMMENCEMENT OF HIS PREACHING AND MIRACLES—MARRIAGE AT CANA.

FROM the time the Romans subdued Judea, the superstitious inhabitants of that country, impatient to see the arrival of the Messiah or Deliverer, so often promised to their fathers, seemed inclined to quicken the slowness of the Eternal by the ardour of their desires. This disposition of mind gave birth to impostures, revolts, and disturbances; the authors of which the Roman power punished in such a manner as to discourage their adherents, or at least quickly to disperse them. Down to the era we are about to speak of, (which the gospel of St. Luke fixes at the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius), none of those who had attempted to pass for the Messiah had been able to succeed. To have acted that part well, there was need of forces more considerable than those which all Judea could oppose to the conquerors of the world. It was therefore necessary to have recourse to craft, and to employ delusions and trick in place of force. For this purpose, it was of importance to be well acquainted with the disposition of the Jewish nation; to

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affect a great respect for its laws and usages, for which it entertained the most profound veneration; to profit ingeniously by the predictions with which they were imbued; to move the passions, and warm the imaginations of that fanatical and credulous people. But all this behoved to be silently effected; it was necessary for him who attempted it to avoid rendering himself suspected by the Romans; it was necessary to be on his guard against the priests, doctors, and persons of education, capable of penetrating and thwarting his designs. It was therefore essential to commence with gaining adherents and co-operators, and thereafter a party among the people, to support him against the grandees of the nation. Policy required to shew himself rarely in the capital, to preach in the country, and render odious to the populace, priests who devoured the nation, nobles who oppressed it, and rich people of whom it ought to be naturally jealous. Not to alarm minds too much, prudence demanded that he should speak in ambiguous language and parables. Neither could he dispense with working miracles, which much more than all the harangues in the world were at all times calculated to seduce ignorant devotees, disposed to see the finger of God in every act, the true causes of which they were unable to develope.*

* Miracles, says Boulanger, appear to have been invented to supply the want of good reasons. Truth and evidence have no need of miracles to ensure their reception. Is it not very astonishing that God Almighty should find it easier to derange the order of Nature, than to convince mankind of truths the most evident, and calculated to force their assent? Miracles were introduced to prove things which it is impossible to believe; for there is no need of miracles when we talk of reason. Things

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Such was the conduct of the personage whose life we examine. Whether we suppose that he had been in Egypt, for the purpose of acquiring the talents necessary to his views, or that he had always resided at Nazareth, Jesus was not ignorant of the dispositions of his countrymen. As he knew how much predictions were indispensably requisite to work upon the minds of the Jews, he made choice of a prophet and a forerunner in the person of his cousin John Baptist. The latter, evidently in concert with Jesus, preached repentance, baptized on the banks of the Jordan, and announced the coming of a personage greater than himself. He said to those who gave ear to him, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to loose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire."

Jesus accordingly repaired to John on purpose to arrange matters with him, and to receive baptism from his hands. According to the report of St. Matthew, John, at first, made some difficulty, affirming, that so far from being worthy to baptize Jesus, it was from him

incredible are here adduced in proof of incredible things. Almost all impostors who have fabricated religions, have announced incredibilities to mankind. They have afterwards fabricated miracles in proof of those incredibilities. "You cannot (they said) comprehend what I tell you; but I will clearly prove that I tell the truth, by doing things that you cannot comprehend." Truth is simple and evident; the marvellous is ever to be suspected. Nature is always true to herself; she acts by invarying laws. To say that God performs miracles, is to say that he contradicts himself, and violates the laws which he has prescribed to nature; it is to say, that he renders useless human reason, of which he is the author.

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that he himself ought to receive baptism. At last, however, he yielded to the orders of Christ, and administered to him the sacrament of which the innocent son of God could not stand in need.*

There is reason to believe, that in this interview the two kinsmen settled their plans, and took the necessary measures for making them succeed. They both had ambition, and shared the mission between them :—St. John yielded the first character to Jesus, whom he judged better qualified to play it with success, and contented himself with being his precursor, preaching in the desert, beating up for followers, and preparing the ways for him—all in consequence of a prophecy of Isaiah, who had said, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God"—an obscure and vague prediction, in which, however, Christians believe they see clearly designed the Messiah and his holy precursor.

The arrangements being once settled by our two missionaries, John took care to tell those who came to

* St. Matthew, chap. iii. 14. The Jews were in the use of baptizing all the proselytes they made. Baptism was, according to them, a *regeneration*, calculated to render the baptized quite a new man, in so far as to be then entitled to marry his own mother. But John and Jesus wished to baptize, or regenerate, the Jews themselves, pretending that regeneration was as necessary for them as for the proselytes. See Bernard in Nouvelles de la Republ. des Lettres, tome. 31. page 566.

The ceremony of baptism was practised in the mysteries of Mythias, and those initiated were thereby regenerated. Mythias was also a mediator. Though Christian divines consider baptism necessary to salvation, we find Paul would not suffer the Corinthians to be baptized. We also learn that he circumcised Timothy.—*Christianity Unveiled*, p. 114.

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to hear him, that, to pacify Heaven, it was time to repent;* that the arrival of the Messiah was not far off; and that he had seen him. The sermons of John having made considerable noise, the priests of Jerusalem, vigilant as to what might interest religion, and wishing to be informed of his views, and acquainted with his person, they dispatched emissaries after him; these men put some questions to him, and asked if he was the Christ, or Elias, or a prophet.† John answered, that he was none of these. But when he was asked by what authority he baptized and preached, he declared, that he was the forerunner of the Messiah. This proceeding of the priests only tended to give

* The superstitious man, if he be wicked, gives himself up to crime with remorse; but his religion quickly furnishes him with the means of getting rid of it. His life is generally a long series of error and grief; of sin and expiation. Still he frequently commits crimes of greater magnitude in order to expiate the former. Destitute of any permanent ideas of morality, he accustoms himself to look on nothing as a crime, but that which the ministers and interpreters of heaven forbid him to commit. He thus considers actions of the blackest dye, which are held out to him as agreeable to God, as the means of effacing his transgressions. History affords numerous examples of fanatics expiating, by the most atrocious persecutions, their adulteries, infamy, unjust wars, and usurpations; and, to wash away their iniquities, bathe themselves in the blood of those superstitious beings, whose infatuation made them martyrs.

† It was an opinion received by several Jews, that Elias must come before the Messiah. A great number of Christians believe also, in our days, that the coming of Elias ought to precede the advent of Jesus Christ, in order to judge the world. See the sentiments of the fathers on the return of Elias. It is also the opinion of the Jansenists at this day, who, like the first Christians, have their heads filled with fanatical and woeful ideas of the near end of the world.

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greater weight to John's assertions, and naturally excited the curiosity of the people assembled to hear him. The next day they went in a crowd to the place where the preacher baptized, when, profiting skilfully by the circumstance, and perceiving Jesus approaching, he exclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, after me cometh a man which is preferred before me."

It is proper to observe, that the author of the gospel ascribed to John, perceiving that it was important to remove the suspicion of collusion between Jesus and his forerunner, makes the Baptist declare twice that *he knew him not*, before baptizing him; but that it had been revealed to him by the Deity, that the person, on whom he should see the Holy Ghost descending during his baptism, was the Son of God. From thence we see that according to this evangelist, John did not know Jesus, who was however his kinsman, according to St. Luke.

John was much esteemed by the people, whom a kind of austere and extraordinary life has always the power of seducing. They did not suspect that a missionary, so detached from the things of this world, could ever deceive them. They believed on his word, that the Holy Ghost, under the form of a dove,* had

* The Holy Ghost was, according to the new manifestation of it, a *bodily Being*, which could appear in one or many distinct bodies, at one and the same time. At Pentecost it came *like the rushing of a mighty wind*, and appeared on the head of each speaker *like a fiery cloven tongue*. There is not a word of the Holy Ghost in all the Old Testament. There is mention made of the Holy Spirit as a nature, or quality; but not of the Holy Ghost as a *bodily* thing.—*P. Anct.*

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descended on Jesus, and that he was the Christ or Messiah promised by the prophets.

On another occasion we will also find John Baptist affecting not to know his cousin Jesus Christ: he deputed to him some of his disciples to learn *who he was?* Jesus replied, that they had only to relate to John the miracles he had operated, and by that sign their master would recognise him. We shall have occasion afterwards to speak of this embassy.*

Jesus had associated with him a confident, then called Simon, and afterwards Cephas or Peter, who had been the disciple of John. Scarcely had Simon taken his arrangements with the Messiah, when he drew over his brother Andrew to the new sect. These two brothers were fishermen. We readily presume, that Christ would not choose his followers among the grandees of the country.

The progress of John Baptist, and the attachment of the people to him, alarmed the priests; they complained loudly, and John was arrested by order of the tetrarch Herod, who, according to St. Matthew, made him be beheaded through complaisance to Herodias his sister-in-law. Yet we do not find the historians of this prince reproaching him with the punishment of the forerunner. After John's death, his disciples attached themselves to Christ, whose coming John had announced, and who, in his turn, had rendered in behalf of John the most public testimonies in presence of the people: for Jesus had openly declared, that John was "greater than a prophet, and greater than an angel, and that he was not born of woman who was greater than him." Nevertheless, the Messiah, dread-

* See Chap. XI. of this work.

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ing to be involved in the affair of his forerunner, left his two disciples at Jerusalem, and withdrew into the desert, where he staid forty days. It has been remarked, that during the imprisonment of John, Christ did not think of delivering him; he performed no miracle in his behalf; after his death, he spoke but little of him, and forbore pronouncing his eulogy. He had no more need of him, and perhaps he wished by this conduct, to give a lesson to those who serve the views of the ambitious only in a secondary capacity, and teach them that they ought not to reckon too much on gratitude.

It would have been a bad exordium to assign fear as the motive of the Messiah's retreat. The gospel informs us that he was *carried up by the Spirit*, which transported him to the desert. It was necessary that Christ should surpass his forerunner. The latter had led a very austere life, his only nourishment being wild honey and locusts; but the gospel affirms, that Jesus eat *nothing at all* during his retreat, and that on the last day, having *felt himself hungry*, angels came and ministered to him.

Moreover, to evince the importance of his mission, the prejudice which it was to occasion to the empire of the devil, and the infinite advantages which were to result from it to his followers, Jesus on his return pretended that Satan had tempted him; made the most flattering offers on purpose to engage him to desist from his enterprise; and proffered him the monarchy of the universe, if he would renounce his project of redeeming the human race. The refusal he gave to these propositions, evinced a supernatural desire to labour for the salvation of the world. Such as heard these details must have been filled with aston-

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ishment, penetrated with gratitude, and burning with zeal for the preacher; of consequence, the number of his adherents increased.

St. John the Evangelist, or the person who has written under his name, whose object appears particularly to have been to establish the divinity of Jesus, has not mentioned his carrying away, abode in the desert, and temptation. These transactions must have been reckoned by him prejudicial to the doctrine he wanted to introduce. St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke, relate the carrying away, and temptations which ensued, in a different manner, but calculated to shew the power of Satan over the Messiah. In fact, he transported him, no doubt in spite of himself, to the pinnacle of the temple, and by an astonishing miracle made Jesus contemplate, from the summit of a mountain, all the kingdoms of the universe, without even excepting those whose inhabitants were *antipodes* of Judea. It must be confessed, that, according to the gospels, the devil works marvels, which yield in nothing to those of Christ.

The flight and absence of Jesus made him lose for some time, his two first disciples Peter and Andrew. The necessity of providing for their own subsistence, constrained them to resume their former trade of fishers. As their master durst not then sojourn at Jerusalem, he retired towards the banks of the sea of Galilee, where he recovered them. "Follow me (said he to them); Leave your nets; of catchers of fish I will make you fishers of men.* He probably made them under-

* This doctrine was zealously acted upon during all the Nazarene era. The Roman Catholics *fished*, in many parts of the globe, with the net of sword, fire, and water; they op-

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stand, that the reflections he had made during his retirement, furnished him with certain means of subsisting without toil, by the credulity of the vulgar. The two brothers forthwith followed him.

Whether Jesus had been expelled from Nazareth by his fellow citizens, or whether he had quitted it of his own accord, he departed and fixed his residence for the time at Capernaum, a maritime city, situated on the confines of the tribes of Zabulon and Naphtali. His mother, a widow, or separated from her husband, followed him: she could be useful to Jesus, and the little troop of adherents who lived with him.

It was at this time, that our hero, seconded by his disciples, betook himself to preaching. His sermon, like that of John, consisted in saying, *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* We ought perhaps at this period to fix the era of the mission of Christ. John, we have seen, commenced preaching in the fifteenth year of Tiberius; it was in the same year, that his interview with Jesus took place, when he was baptized by John. It was also towards the end of this year that John disappeared: after which Jesus was in the desert, from whence he returned to reside with his mother in the city of Capernaum. There he sojourned

pressed in all their dominions (to their everlasting shame), the Jews, as well as other persuasions of mankind. Our modern *reformed* Nazarenes continue to recognise the same doctrine, *but with good prospects and humanity*, and not without a beneficial view towards mankind. They formed themselves into a *Fisher Society*, in order to support *fishers* or *proselytes*, and to assist, in some measure, the poor and unintelligent *fishes* which fall in their net. Indeed such a command or doctrine is not to be found in any part of the Bible, nor in the Talmudical Treatises of the Hebrews.—*Vide* "The Constancy of Israel," page 42.

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a short time only, on account of the approach of the festival of the passover, to celebrate which he repaired to Jerusalem. We may, therefore, fix the commencement of Christ's preaching at the sixteenth year of Tiberius. This is the only system the gospel presents. He celebrated the passover three times before his death; and the common opinion is, that his preaching lasted three years, or until the nineteenth year of the same emperor.

The rumours excited by the baptism and preaching of John, and the testimonies he bore in behalf of Christ, having died away on the imprisonment and punishment of the forerunner, and flight of the Messiah, the latter resumed courage, and thought that, with the assistance of his disciples, he ought to make a new attempt. Too well known or disparaged at Nazareth, and slighted by his kinsfolk, who, on all occasions, seemed to know what to think of him, Jesus quitted that ungrateful city on purpose to establish himself, as we have remarked, at Capernaum, in the sixteenth year of Tiberius. It was there that he betook himself to preaching his new system to some poor fishermen, and other low people. He soon found, however, that his mission was too circumscribed in that place: but to acquire same eclat, he judged it necessary to perform a miracle, that is to say, in the language of the Jews, some trick capable of exciting the wonderment of the vulgar. An opportunity occurred for this: some inhabitants of Cana, a small village of Galilee Superior, at the distance of about fifteen leagues from Capernaum, invited Jesus and his mother to a wedding. The married persons were poor, though St. John, who alone relates this story, gives them a steward; yet he tells us, that their wine failed at the moment the guests

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were half intoxicated, or gay, and that the pitchers were found empty. On this Mary, who knew the power or the dexterity of her son, spoke to him : *They have no wine*, said she, in an insinuating tone; Jesus answered her very roughly, and in a manner which evidently denoted a man warmed with wine; *Woman, what have I to do with thee?* It may however be supposed, that Christ had not totally lost the use of his reason, as he still possessed presence of mind to transmute water into wine, so that the miraculous wine was even found better than the natural wine they had drank at first.

This first miracle of Jesus was performed in presence of a great number of witnesses, already half drunk; but the text does not inform us, whether they were equally astonished the day following, when the fumes of the wine were dissipated. Perhaps, indeed, this miracle was witnessed by the steward alone, with whom it is not impossible Jesus had secret intelligence. The incredulous, less easily persuaded than the poor half-intoxicated villagers, do not observe in this transmutation of water into wine, a motive for being convinced of the divine power of Jesus. They remark, that in the operation, he employed water in order to make his wine; a circumstance which may give room to suspect, that he made only a composition, of which he, like many others, might have the secret.*

* A supernatural event, in order to be believed, requires much stronger proofs than a fact no way contradictory to probability. It is easy to believe, on the testimony of Philostrates, that Appollonius existed, because his existence has nothing in it contrary to reason; but I will not believe Philostrates, when he tells me that Appollonius performed miracles. I believe that Jesus Christ died; but I do not believe that he rose from the dead.—*Boulanger.*

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There was, in fact, no more power necessary to create wine, and fill the pitchers without putting water into them, than to make an actual transmutation of water into wine. At least, by acting in this manner, he would have removed the suspicion of having made only a mixture.

In whatever manner the miracle may have been performed, it appears to have made some impression on those who saw it, or who heard it related. It is certain Jesus profited by it to extend his mission even to the capital of Judea; only giving time for his miracle to spread, in order to produce its effect. In expectation of this, he withdrew with his mother, brothers, and disciples, to Capernaum, where he remained till the festival of the passover (the time of which was near) should collect at Jerusalem a multitude of people, before whom he flattered himself with being able to operate a great number of marvels.

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CHAPTER V.

JOURNEY OF CHRIST TO JERUSALEM—THE SELLERS DRIVEN OUT OF THE TEMPLE—CONFERENCE WITH NICODEMUS.

THE noise of the miracle at Cana having reached Jerusalem, by means of those who repaired to that city from Galilee, Jesus went there himself, accompanied by some of his disciples; but of the number of the latter we are ignorant. It was, as has been mentioned, the time of the passover, and consequently, a moment when almost the whole nation were assembled in the capital. Such an occasion was doubtless favourable for working miracles. St. John accordingly affirms that Jesus performed a great number, without, however, detailing any of them. Several of the witnesses of Christ's power believed in him, according to our historian; but he did not place much confidence in them. The reason given for this is, "Because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man; for he knew what was in man."*—In short, he knew every thing, except the means of giving to those who saw his miracles the dispositions he desired.

* St. John ii. 24 and 25.

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But, how reconcile faith in the wonders performed by Jesus, in these new converts, with the bad dispositions they were known to possess? If he knew the state of mind of these witnesses of his miracles, why perform them with certain loss? In this there is a want of just inference in the writer, which must not, however, be imputed to Jesus. It is perhaps better not to refer to St. John in this matter, than to believe that his sagacious master would perform miracles without design, or for the sole pleasure of working them.

In the same journey to Jerusalem, Christ performed an exploit which is as great as a miracle, and evinces a very powerful arm. According to an ancient usage, merchants had established themselves, especially during the solemn festivals, under the porticos which environed the temple. They furnished victims and offerings to the devout, which they were to present to the Lord, in order to accomplish the ordinances of the law; and, for the accommodation of the Jews who repaired thither from different countries, and for their own interest, the priests had permitted the money changers to fix their offices in this place. Jesus, who on every occasion shewed himself but little favourable to the clergy, was shocked at this usage, which, far from being criminal, tended to facilitate the accomplishment of the Mosaical law. He made a scourge of ropes, and, displaying a vigorous arm on those merchants, drove them into the streets, frightened their cattle, and overturned the counters, without any, in their astonishment, being able to oppose his enterprise. It may be conjectured, the people had no reason to be displeased with the disturbance, and that they profited by the money and effects which Jesus overturned in the paroxysm of his zeal. No doubt his disciples did not

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forget themselves on this occasion; their master could by this exploit make provision for them, especially if they had been in the secret, and enable them to defray all expenses during their residence in the capital.* Besides, they saw in this event the accomplishment of a prophecy of the Psalmist, who foretold, that the Messiah would be "eaten up with the zeal of the house of the Lord"—a prophecy which was evidently verified by the uproar which Christ had occasioned. With respect to the merchants, it would appear they had not comprehended the mystic sense of this prediction, or at least they did not expect to see it verified at their own expence. In their first surprise, they did not oppose the unexpected attacks of a man who must have appeared to them a maniac; but, on recovering from their astonishment, they complained to the magistrates of the loss they had sustained. The magistrates, afraid, perhaps, of involving their authority, by punishing a man of whom the people had become the accomplice, or a fanatic whose zeal might be approved of by devotees, did not wish to use rigour for this time; they contented themselves with sending to Jesus, to know from himself by what authority he acted—"What sign (said they to Christ) shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?" On which Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple,

* St. Augustin says, that, *of right divine, all things* belong to the just:—a maxim founded on a passage in the Psalms, which states, that the just shall eat the fruit of the labour of the unrighteous. It is known that the Pope, by a bull given in favour of the kings of Castile, Arragon, and Portugal, fixed the line of *demarcation*, which was to rule the conquests each had gained over the Infidels. After such principles, is not the whole earth to become a prey to Christian rapacity?

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and in three days I will raise it up." But the Jews were not tempted to make trial of this;—they took him for a fool, and returned, shrugging their shoulders. If, however, they had taken Christ at his word, they would have experienced great embarassment; for the gospel informs us, that it was not of the temple of Jerusalem he spoke, but of his own body. He meant his resurrection, says St. John, which was to happen three days after his death. The Jews had not sufficient discernment to divine this enigma, and the disciples themselves did not penetrate its true meaning till a long time after, when they pretended their master had risen from the dead. We cannot forbear admiring Providence, which, wishing to instruct, enlighten, and convert the Jewish people by the mouth of Christ, employed only figures, allegories, and enigmatical symbols, totally inexplicable by persons the most ingenious and most experienced.*

But though Jesus had the power of raising himself from the dead, he did not wish to employ this marvellous power in saving himself when in the hands of the

* Religion is by no means formed for even the most intelligent part of mankind, who, as well as the uninstructed, are utterly incapable of comprehending any of those aerial subtilties on which it rests. Who is the man that understands the doctrines of the *spirituality* of God; of the *immateriality* of the soul; or of the *mysteries* of religion?—None indeed will pretend to this. Yet we find these theological speculations, which no one understands, have frequently disturbed the repose of mankind, through the stubborn dispositions of those who gave them credence. Even the women have believed themselves obliged to take a part in the quarrels, excited by idle contemplators, who are always of less utility to society than the meanest artizan.

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Jews, ready to arrest and punish him as a disturber of the public repose. He thought it more convenient and prudent to decamp, without noise, and shelter himself by natural ways from the pursuit of those whom his brilliant expedition might have displeased. He proposed, therefore, to withdraw from Jerusalem during night, when a devout Pharisee, wishing to be instructed, came to see him. He was called Nicodemus, and held the place of senator—a rank which does not always exempt from incredulity. "Rabbi, (said he to Jesus), we know that thou art a teacher sent from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."

This opportunity was favourable for Jesus to declare himself: by a single word he could have decided on his divinity, and acknowledged, before this senator so kindly disposed, that he was God. Yet he did none of this; he evaded answering directly, and contented himself with saying to Nicodemus, that nobody can share in the kingdom of God unless he born again. The astonished proselyte exclaimed, that it was impossible for a man already old to be born again, or enter of new into his mother's womb. On which Jesus replied: "I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." It appears, that Nicodemus was not better satisfied than before; Jesus, therefore, to make himself more perspicuous, added, "Knowest thou not, that what is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit? Marvel not, that I said unto thee, ye must be born again—The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the spirit."

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In spite of the precision and plainness of these instructions (resembling the reasonings of our theologians), Nicodemus, whose understanding was doubtless shut up, did not yet comprehend any part of them —"How (asks he) can these things be?" Here Jesus, pushed to extremity, grew angry. "How (says he to him), art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, we speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen, and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven but he that came down from heaven, even the son of man which is in heaven."*

We thought it our duty to relate this curious dialogue, as a specimen of the logic of Jesus; the more so as it seems to have served as a model for the fashion of reasoning observed by all the Christian doctors, who are in the use of explaining obscure things by things still more obscure and unintelligible. They terminate all disputes, by referring the decision to their own testimony; that is, to the authority of the church or clergy, entrusted by God himself with regulating what the faithful ought to believe.

The rest of the conversation of Jesus with Nicodemus is equally perspicuous, and in the same tone: Christ alone speaks, and appears by dint of his reasons to have silenced the docile senator, who, it seems, retired fully convinced. Thus it is, that a lively faith disposes the elect to yield to the lessons, dogmas, and mysteries of religion, even when it is impossible to at-

* St. John iii. 1–13.

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tach any meaning to the words they hear pronounced.*

* The first of the Christian virtues, says Boulanger, is *faith*, which serves as a foundation for all the others. It consists in an *impossible conviction* of the revealed doctrines, and absurd fables, which the Christian religion commands its disciples to believe. Hence it appears, that this virtue exacts a total renunciation of reason, an impracticable assent to improbable facts, and a blind submission to the authority of priests, who are the only guarantees of the truth of the doctrines and miracles that every Christian must believe, under penalty of damnation. This virtue, though so necessary to all mankind, is, nevertheless, a gift of heaven, and the effect of special grace. It forbids all doubt and enquiry, and it deprives man of the liberty of exercising his reason and reflection. It reduces him to the passive acquiescence of beasts, in matters which he is, at the same time, told are of all things the most important to his eternal happiness. Hence it is plain, that faith is a virtue invented by men, who, shrinking from the light of reason, deceived their fellow creatures, to subject them to their own authority, and degraded them, that they might exercise an empire over their minds. If faith be a virtue, it is certainly useful only to the spiritual guides of the Christians; for they alone gather its fruits. It cannot but be injurious to other men, who are taught by it to despise that reason which distinguishes them from brutes, and is their only faithful guide in this world. Christians, however, represent this reason as perverted, and an unfaithful guide; by which they seem to intimate that it was not made for reasonable beings. But may we not ask, how far this renunciation of reason ought to be carried? Do not they themselves, in certain cases, have recourse to reason? Do they not appeal to reason, when they endeavour to prove the existence of their God?

It is an absurdity to say, we believe that of which we have no conception. What then are the motives of the Christian for entertaining such a belief?--His confidence in his spiritual guides. But what is the foundation of this confidence?--Revelation. On what then is Revelation itself founded?--On the authority of spiritual guides. Such is the manner in which Christians reason.

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There is no further mention of Nicodemus—We know not whether he resigned his office of senator to enrol himself among the disciples of Christ. Perhaps he was contented with secretly furnishing succours to Jesus and his troop, in gratitude for the luminous instructions he had received. There is reason to believe, that he knew how to profit by them, for St. John makes him return on the scene after the death of Christ, bringing a hundred pounds weight of aloes and myrrh, for the purpose of embalming his body, and interring it, with the assistance of Joseph of Arimathea. This would prove, that he had come from his conversation with Jesus a more able theologist than he had begun it. It is to be presumed, that, on this occasion, Jesus granted him grace effectual or sufficient, (saving grace,)* without which it would have been perfectly impossible to comprehend any of his sublime theology.

It must, however, be owned, that the impossibility of comprehending the doctrine of Jesus furnishes to the

* According to theology, men have occasion for *supernatural grace* to do good. This doctrine is without doubt very hurtful to sound morality. Men always wait for the *call from above* to do good, and those who direct them never employ the *calls from below*, that is the natural motives, to excite them to virtue. But the clergy know not how to give a true definition of virtue. They say it is an effect of grace that disposes men to do that which is agreeable to the Divinity. But what is grace? How does it act upon man? What is it that is agreeable to God? Wherefore doeth not God give to all men the grace to do that which is agreeable in his eyes? *Adhuc sub judice est.* We are unceasingly told to do good, *because God requires* it; but no one has ever been able to teach us what that good is which is acceptable to the Almighty, and by the performance of which we shall obtain his approbation.

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incredulous a plausible pretext for denying that it can be divine. They cannot conceive why a God, sent solely to instruct men, should never distinctly explain himself. No oracle of Paganism employed terms more ambiguous, than the divine missionary chosen by Providence to enlighten nations. It may therefore be concluded, that in this God himself made it his study to create obstacles to his projects, and that he laid an unavoidable snare not only for the Jews, but also for all those who must read the gospel, in order to draw from thence the knowledge necessary to salvation; a conduct which appears equally unworthy of a good and just God, endowed with prescience and wisdom;* yet with faith we may at last succeed in reconciling every thing, and readily comprehend why God should speak without wishing to be understood.†

* It was said to a very celebrated philosopher, that God had made man after his own image. "Man has returned him the compliment," replied the sage. Xenophanes observed, that if the ox or the elephant understood sculpture or painting, they would not fail to represent the Divinity under their own peculiar figure. In this they would have as much reason as Polycletus, or Phidias, who gave him the human form. We see, says Lamotte Le Vayer, that *theanthrophy* serves for the foundation of all *Christianity*.

† It is evident, says Mirabaud, that all revelation which is not distinct, or which teaches *mysteries*, cannot be the work of a wise and intelligent being. As soon as he speaks, they ought to presume that it is for the purpose of being understood by those to whom he intends to manifest himself. To speak so as not to be understood, only announces folly, or want of good faith. It is then demonstrable, that every thing which the priesthood have called *mystery*, are inventions to throw a thick veil over their own peculiar contradictions, and their own peculiar ignorance of the Divinity. They think to solve

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As soon as Jesus had quitted Nicodemus he left Jerusalem, his abode in which had become very dangerous, and betook himself to wandering through the country of Judea, where he enjoyed greater safety. There is reason to presume, that the scandal he had occasioned in the capital, where so great a multitude were then assembled, had not failed to make him known to many; he however succeeded in gaining partisans in the country. But how did he employ himself during this period? St. John informs us, in chapter third, that he baptized; thereafter he tells us, in chapter fourth, that he did not baptize, but that his disciples baptized for him.

One thing is certain, that after this he quitted Judea on purpose to go into Galilee. It was perhaps to be still more private, or to prevent the schism, which, according to the gospel, was ready to take place between the Jews baptized by John, and those whom Jesus and

all difficulties, by saying *it is a mystery*. Besides, the interest of the clergy dictates that man should know nothing of that pretended science, of which they have made themselves the depositaries.

Revelation, remarks the same intelligent writer, far from being a proof of the goodness of God, or of his commiseration for men, is only a proof of his malice. Indeed all revelation supposes the Divinity has been capable of leaving the human species, during a considerable period, unacquainted with truths the most important to their happiness. This revelation, made to a small number of chosen men, would moreover suppose a partiality, and an unjust predilection, but litle compatible with the goodness of the common father of the human race. This revelation injures the divine immutability, since, by it, God would have permited men, at one time, to be ignorant of his will, and, at another time, that they should be instructed in it.

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his disciples had on their part baptized. Jesus conceived that prudence required him to be at a distance, in order to leave the field more free to a man whom he knew still useful to his own interest, and who, as we have seen, contented himself with playing the second part under him. It very soon appeared that Christ made a greater number of proselytes than his cousin, and this circumstance in the end might have created a misunderstanding between them. Jesus therefore directed his march toward Samaria, whither we are to follow him, and from thence he again passed into Galilee.

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CHAPTER VI.

ADVENTURE OF JESUS WITH THE FEMALE SAMARITAN—HIS JOURNEY AND MIRACLES IN THE COUNTRY OF THE GERASENES.

IT may be observed here once for all, that in this examination of the history of Jesus, we follow the most generally received arrangement of facts, without meaning to guarantee, that they occurred precisely in that order. Chronological mistakes are not of much importance, when they do not influence the nature of events. Besides, the evangelists, without fixing any eras, content themselves with saying *at that time*, which, at the period we live, dispenses with our giving a very exact chronology of the following transactions. Precision, indeed, would require a labour as immense as superfluous, and would only tend to shew that the history of Jesus, dictated by the Holy Ghost, is much more incorrect than that of celebrated Pagans, even of an antiquity more remote. It would also prove that the inspired writers of this important history contradict themselves every instant, by making their hero act at the same time in different places, and often remote from each other. On the other hand, this painful labour would not inform us which of the evangelists we ought to follow in preference to his brethren, seeing all in the eyes of faith have equally truth on their side. Time and place

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change nothing in the nature of facts; and it is from these facts we must endeavour to form our ideas of the legislator of the Christians.

Jesus having begun his journey in the summer season, felt himself oppressed with thirst near Sichar, in the country of Samaria; an incident which gave rise to a singular adventure. Near this city there was a well, known by the name of the fountain of Jacob. Fatigued with his journey, Christ sat down on the brink of the well, waiting the return of his disciples, who had gone to the city in quest of provisions. It was about noon, when a female came to draw water from the fountain. Jesus asked her to drink out of the vessel she held; but the Samaritan, who knew from his countenance that he was a Jew, was astonished at his request, as there was no commerce or friendship between the orthodox Jews and the Samaritans. According to the custom of partisans of different sects, they detested each other most cordially. The Messiah, who was not so delicate as the ordinary Jews, undertook the conversion of the female heretic, for whose sex and profession we find in him a weakness through the whole course of his history. "If thou knewest," said he to her, "the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." The Samaritan woman, who did not observe Jesus have any vessel in his hand, asked from whence he could draw the living water of which he spoke? On this the Messiah, assuming a mysterious tone,* answered her, "Whoso drinketh of

* A mysterious and unintelligible tone is essentially necessary to the ministers of all religions. A clear intelligible religion without mystery, would appear less divine to the gene-

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this well shall thirst again, but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; it shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."—Our female adventurer, who was a dame of easy virtue, asked some of that marvellous water, calculated to exempt her from coming afterwards to draw any; Jesus, who, from the discourse, had been able to discover the profession of this woman, ingeniously got off from the business, by telling her to go seek her husband and return; reckoning, perhaps, on being able to steal away when she was gone. But the lady related to him her life; gave some details of her conduct; and thereby enabled him to conjecture enough of it to speak as a conjuror. Accordingly he told her that she had had five husbands; that she had none at that time, and that the man with whom she lived was only a gallant. Immediately, the Samaritan woman took Jesus for a sorcerer or a prophet; he did not deny it; and as he was not afraid of being stoned or punished at the moment, he made bold for the first time to confess that he was the Messiah.

They were at this part of their dialogue, when the

rality of men, and would be less useful to the sacerdotal order, whose interest it is that the people should comprehend nothing of that which they believe to be the most important to them. Here is without doubt the secret of the clergy. The priest must have a metaphysical and incomprehensible Deity, whom he makes speak and act in an unintelligible manner, reserving to himself the right of explaining to mortals his pleasure in his own manner; while the people, who in general wish to have their imaginations pleased, rather than their understandings instructed, give the preference to a God that is most concealed, most mysterious, and most unknown. Hence the transition of many nations, who adored the sun, to the worship of an invisible agency.—*Mirabaud.*

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return of Jesus' disciples put an end to the conversation. The latter, whether they knew the profession of the loquacious dame, or were more intolerant than their master, were scandalized and surprized at the tete-a-tete; yet none of them dared to criticise the conduct of Christ. On the other hand, the Samaritan woman seeing his retinue, believed in reality that he was a prophet or the Messiah; so leaving her pitcher, she went directly to Sichar, "Come and see," said she to the inhabitants, "a man who told me all things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?"—The astonished inhabitants assembled, went out and met Jesus; and charmed with hearing him preach, without comprehending one word of his discourse, they invited him to come and reside with them. He yielded to their offers for two days only: the provisions purchased were put up in reserve, and the troop lived during that time at the cost of these heretics, delighted no doubt with defraying the expences of the Saviour and his followers.

All the marvellous in this adventure turns on Jesus having divined that the Samaritan lady had had five husbands, and lived at that time in criminal intercourse with a favourite. Yet it is easy to perceive that Christ could learn this anecdote, either in his conversation with the prating dame, or by public rumour, or some other very simple way.

But unbelievers find another reason for criticising this relation of St. John: and laying aside the marvellous, they attack the truth of the transaction. All history attests, that in the time of Jesus Christ, Samaria was peopled by colonies of different nations, which the Assyrians had transported thither after the destruction of the kingdom of Israel. This would seem to exclude the expectation of the Messiah, in which, according to

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St. John, the Samaritans lived. Pagans and Idolators could not have very distinct notions of an event particular to Judea. If the Samaritans were the descendants of Jacob, it was not necessary to put into the mouth of the Samaritan woman these words, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and ye say, Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." It was also absurd to make Jesus say, "ye shall no more worship the Father, either in this mountain or at Jerusalem; ye worship ye know not what." First, the law of Moses does not forbid the worshipping God in whatever place we may find ourselves. Secondly, the laws or usages of the Jews required, in the time of Christ, that none should offer sacrifice any where except in the temple of the capital: but the places of prayer depended on every man's own will and pleasure. Thirdly, it is absurd to aver, that the descendants of Jacob did not know the God whom they adored to be Jehovah, the God of Moses and the Jews; unless it is pretended, that they did not know whom they worshipped. On this head, indeed, since the mission of Jesus, Christians have undoubtedly nothing to reproach them with. Fourthly, The words of Jesus on this occasion seem to insinuate, that he wanted to abolish the worship of the Father; at least it is certain that Christians share their homage between him and his Son, which, faith apart, appears to annihilate the dogma of the unity of God.* Moreover, Jesus did

* The dogma of the trinity is evidently borrowed from the reveries of Plato, or from the allegories under which that romantic philosopher chose to conceal his doctrines. It appears, that the Christian religion is indebted to him for the greater part of its dogmas. Plato admitted three *Hypostases*, or modes

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not guess rightly in saying, that the Father would be no longer worshipped either at Jerusalem, or on the mountain; for this Father has not ceased one instant to be worshipped there for these eighteen centuries past, by Jews, by Christians, and thereafter by Mahometans.

If it is maintained that the Samaritan woman was a heathen, it is not very likely that she would have regarded Jesus as the Messiah, whom she neither knew of nor expected. Add also to this, that the Samaritans believed in Jesus on the word of a courtezan; a credulity of which Jews and Christians only could be susceptible. Jesus and his disciples were Jews, and in that character excluded from Samaria. It imports not therefore by whom the country was inhabited.

Two days having elapsed, and the Samaritans of Sichar being, in all appearance, sufficiently instructed, Jesus quitted their city, and accompanied by his disciples, took the road of Upper Galilee. In this jour-

of being in the divinity: the first constituted the supreme God; the second, the *Logos, word,* or *divine intelligence,* proceeding from the first; the third is the spirit, or soul of the world. The early teachers of the Christian religion appear to have been Platonics; their enthusiasm probably found in Plato a doctrine analogous to their feelings. Had they been grateful, they would have recorded him as a prophet, or, at least, as one of the fathers of the church. The Jesuitical missionaries found a divinity at Thibet nearly similar to that of the Christians. By the Tartars God is called *Kon-cio-cik,* the only God, and *Kon-cio-sum,* the threefold God. They also give him the titles, *Om, Ha, Hum,* intelligence, might, power or word, heart, love. The number three was always revered among the ancients; because *Salom,* in the oriental languages, signifies three, it is made also to signify *health, safety, and salvation.*

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ney, Christ, considering the bad disposition of his countrymen, thought proper not to enter the city of Nazareth, the place of his nativity. He applied to himself the famous proverb, that *a prophet has no honour in his own country.** It was otherwise in the rest of the province:—as soon as the people knew of the arrival of Jesus, they neglected nothing to welcome him. St. Luke assures us that he was esteemed and honoured by every body.† There is reason to believe that these good people had beheld the wonders which he had operated in Jerusalem, during the festival of the passover‡ In gratitude for these favourable dispositions, and for the faith he found among the Galileans, Christ did not content himself with instructing them, but confirmed his mission, and testified his love, by a crowd of prodigies. The number was doubtless very great, as St. Matthew is constrained to say vaguely, that he healed all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people;§—that it was sufficient to present to him the sick, whatever diseases they might be afflicted with; lunatics, whose number was great in that country; idiots, hypochondriacs, and persons possessed with devils, had but to fly to him for relief, and their cure was certain.

This multitude of miracles, for so they style the cures operated by Jesus, drew after him a crowd of idlers and vagabonds, as well from Galilee as from Jerusalem, Decapolis, Judea, and the country beyond Jordan. It was in this journey he made the acquisition of two famous disciples: they were brothers, sons of a fisherman of the name of Zebedee, and called James

* St. John iv. 44.
† St. Luke iv. 44.
‡ St. John iv. 45.
§ St. Matt. iv. 23.

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and John. The first, though very probably he could not read, afterwards composed mystical works, which are even at this day revered by Christians. With respect to John, who was a very fine lad, he became the favourite of his master, and received from him marks of distinguished tenderness. He became afterwards a sublime Platonist, and, through gratitude, deified Christ in the gospels and epistles published in his name.

The reputation and resources of Jesus were so great in Galilee, that to augment the number of his disciples it was only necessary for him to open his mouth and speak. The two disciples already mentioned he called with an intention to keep near his person. Wishing, however, to repose himself after the fatigues of preaching and miracles, he resolved to quit the cities, and retire to the sea coast. He conjectured, that to make himself desirable, and not waste his credit, it was prudent not to suffer himself to be seen either too long or too near. The people, fond of hearing the wonderful sermons of Jesus, followed him. Pressed by the crowd, he happily perceived two vessels; and throwing himself into one of them, "precisely that which appertained to Simon Peter, the first of his disciples, he harangued the eager multitude from it." Thus the boat of a fisherman became a pulpit, from whence the Deity uttered his oracles.

The Galileans were not rich, and accordingly the troop of Jesus' adherents augmented. We find his four first apostles labouring in their trade of fishermen during the abode of the Messiah in the province. The day on which he preached in the vessel had not been fortunate for them; and the night preceding it had not been more favourable. Jesus, who knew more than

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one profession, thought, that it behoved him to do something for people, who shewed so much zeal. When, therefore, he had finished his harangue, and the crowd had retired, he bade Simon advance into the middle of the water, and cast his net; the latter excused himself, saying, that he had already thrown several times without success. But Christ insisted;—then Simon said, *I will cast it on thy word:* on which, by an astonishing miracle, the net broke on all sides. Simon and Andrew being unable to drag it out, they called their comrades, and drew out of it fishes enough to fill two ships. Our fishermen were so surprised, that Peter took his master for a wizard, and prayed him to depart. But Jesus encouraged him, and promised not again to occasion the like alarms, seeing that henceforth he, Peter, should no longer busy himself with the catching of fish.

The Messiah, finding himself near Cana, judged it proper to enter that place, as he had once before performed a miracle there. An officer of Capernaum, whose son was sick of a fever, repaired to this village, on purpose to try the remedies of Jesus, of whose efficacy so many persons boasted. He besought the physician to come to his house, and cure his son; but our Esculapius, who did not chuse to operate before eyes too clear-sighted, got rid of this importunate person in such a way as not to risk himself, in case he should not succeed: Go, said he to the officer, *thy son liveth.* The officer, while approaching his own habitation, learned that the fever, which perhaps was intermittent, had left his son. No more was necessary to cry up the miracle, and convert all the family.

After having traversed the sea coast, and made some stay at Cana, Jesus repaired to Capernaum, where, as

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has been related, he had fixed his residence. The family of Simon Peter was established in that city; and it was no doubt this reason, joined with the bad treatment he had received from the inhabitants of Nazareth, that determined Christ to make choice of this abode. It appears he was abhorred in the city where he had been educated; for as soon as he attempted to preach there, the people wanted to throw him headlong. At Capernaum they listened to and admired him; he harangued in the synagogue, explained the scripture, and shewed that he himself was foretold in it. In the midst of his sermon one sabbath day, they brought him a person possessed, who, perhaps in concert with him, began to cry out with all his might; "Let us alone: what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the holy one of God." The people waited in terror for the issue of this adventure, when Jesus, certain of his ground, addressed himself not to the man, but to the devil possessing him, "Hold thy peace," said he, "and come out of him." Immediately the malign spirit overturned the possessed, threw him into horrible convulsions, and disappeared without any person seeing him.

Physicians, and especially those acquainted with the eastern countries, do not admit miracles of the nature of this one. They know that the diseases taken for *possessions*, were owing solely to disorders produced in the brain by excessive heat. These maladies were frequent in Judea, where superstition and ignorance impeded the progress of medicine and of all useful knowledge.* Out of that country we find but

* Religion, particularly the Christian, has always declared

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few persons possessed with devils. This incredulity strips Jesus of a great number of his miracles; yet even taking away from him the *possessions*, there still remains enough. Most of the possessed found among us are hypochondriacs, maniacs, hysterical women, melancholy persons, and those tormented with the vapours or spasms: or they are impostors, who, to gain money, interest the simple and display the power of the priests, consent to receive the devil, on purpose that the clergy may have the glory of expelling him. There is scarcely a possession amongst us which could resist a flogging.

Miracles are food for the imagination, but the body requires more substantial aliments; the adven-

war against science and all human knowledge, which have been looked upon as obstacles to salvation. Neither reason nor study are necessary to men who are to submit their judgments to the yoke of faith. From the confession of Christians themselves, the founders of their religion were simple and ignorant men. Their disciples must be as little enlightened as they were to admit the fables and reveries they have received from them. It has always been remarked, that the most enlightened men seldom make the best Christians. Science is apt to embarrass faith; moreover it turns the attention from the great work of salvation, which is represented as the only necessary one. If science be serviceable to political society, ignorance is much more so to religion and its ministers. Those ages destitute of science and industry, were the golden age of the church of Christ. Then were kings dutifully submissive to priests; then the coffers of priests held all the riches of society. The ministers of a very numerous sect have even kept from the eyes of their followers, the sacred pages which contain the laws of their religion. This conduct is undoubtedly very discreet; for *reading* the bible is the surest of all means to prevent its being respected. If, in fact, the maxims of the Christian religion respecting science, were rigorously and universally followed, no political society could subsist.—*Boulanger.*

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ture which has been related had led to the hour of dinner. On leaving the synagogue, Jesus was invited to the house of Simon Peter, where every thing appears to have been prepared, for which he might have occasion in performing a second miracle. The mother-in-law of Simon felt herself sick, at the moment they had need of her ministry in managing the kitchen. Jesus, who possessed the talent of very readily curing the kinsfolk of his disciples, took her by the hand, and made her rise from her bed: she came out of it completely cured, cooked the victuals, and found herself in a condition to serve the guests.

The same day, in the dusk of the evening, they brought Jesus all the sick in Capernaum, and all the possessed, whom, according to St. Matthew, he cured by some words; and, according to St. Luke, by laying hands on them. Several devils, on coming out of the possessed, had the impudence to betray the secret of the physician, and openly declare, that he was Christ the Son of God. This indiscretion much displeased Jesus, who wished, or feigned to wish, to keep private.—St. Luke tells us, that "he rebuked them, and suffered them not to speak, for they knew that he was Christ." Here it is proper to remark, that according to theologists, the Son of God, in all his conduct, had in view only to lead the devil astray, and conceal from him the mystery of the redemption. Yet we see, that Jesus was never able to succeed in deceiving his too cunning enemy.—In the whole Gospel system, the devil is more sly and powerful than both God the Father and God the Son: at least it is certain, that he is always successful in thwarting their designs, and succeeds in reducing

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God the Father to the hard necessity of making his dear Son die, in order to repair the evil which Satan had done to mankind. Christianity is real manichæism,* wherein every advantage is on the side of the bad principle, who, by the great number of adherents he continues to acquire, seems to render nugatory all the purposes of the Deity.

If the devil knew that Jesus was the Christ, such knowledge must have been posterior to his retirement into the desert, for he then spoke to him in a style which intimated that he knew him not.—It is, however, superfluous to examine at what time the devil acquired this knowledge; but it is manifest that he had it only by divine permission. Now God, by granting to the devil the knowledge of his Son, either wished, or did not wish, that he should speak of it. If he wished, Jesus did wrong in opposing it, if he did not wish it, how was the devil able to act contrary to the divine will? Jesus carefully concealed his quality, the knowledge whereof could alone operate salvation. But in this case,

* The doctrine of two principles is borrowed from Zoroaster, the celebrated legislator of the Persians, who flourished under Darius Hystaspes. Oromasdes or Oromazus, the ancient of days, and Arimanes, the genius of darkness, are the original divinities of manichæism. Oromazes is the name, which the Magi and Chaldeans gave to the Supreme Being, and which, in the Chaldaic language, signifies burning light. They represent God as surrounded by fire, and declare that his body is like unto light, and his soul unto truth. This God was the good principle, but there was another bad principle which they called Arimanes, or Arimanus, that is in Chaldaic, my enemy, or cunning and deceitful. It is opposed to Oromazes, who was to destroy it however at last. This is the Osiris and Typhon of the Egyptians; this the Pandora of the Greeks; this the Jehovah and Satan of Jews and Christians; and such are the vain efforts of all the sages to explain the origin of good and evil.

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the devil himself had the greatest interest to conceal it. It was therefore contrary to his own interest, and the will of the Almighty, that the devil made known the quality of Christ. Besides, if Jesus really did not wish that the devil should discover him, why delay imposing silence on him until he had spoken?

The conduct of the Messiah in these particulars has made it be believed, that not daring to endanger himself by publicly assuming the quality of Christ, or Son of God, he was not sincerely displeased with the devils, who were at his command, for divulging his secret, and sparing him the trouble of speaking. It was moreover eliciting a very important confession out of the mouth of enemies.

Jesus was not ignorant, that to retain his influence over the minds of men, it was necessary to prevent satiety. Accordingly, on the day following that on which so many miracles had been wrought in Capernaum, he departed before day-break, and withdrew into a desert. All legislators have loved retirement; it is there they have had divine inspirations, and it is on emerging from these mysterious asylums, they have performed miracles calculated to deceive the eyes of the astonished vulgar. Solitary recollection is besides at times necessary, in order to investigate the state of our affairs.

Meanwhile the disciples of Jesus, notwithstanding his flight, did not lose sight of their master; they repaired to him at the moment he thought himself alone, and informed him that they had been every where in search of him. In fact, there were still many sick and possessed persons in the country; yet this consideration did not induce Jesus to return to Capernaum; on which account many resorted to him in his retreat.

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To get rid of them, he again traversed Galilee, where he continued to cure the sick, and cast out devils: this is all the gospel mentions. It appears he tarried little or none at all on his road, and preached as he went along; for in a very short time he had advanced a considerable way on the shore of the sea of Galilee. As the multitude which followed him augmented continually, by supplies of idle and curious people that every village produced, our preacher, finding himself pressed down by the crowd, gave orders to his disciples to convey him to the other side, on the territory of the Gerasenes.

When he was landed, a doctor of the law repaired to him, and offered to become his follower: but Jesus very readily conceived that a *doctor* could not suit him; he would have cut a bad figure in a company composed of fishermen and clowns, such as those of whom the Messiah had formed his court. He gave the doctor to understand, that he would repent of this step: that this kind of life would not agree with him; *the Son of man*, said he to the doctor, *hath no where to lay his head.*

Christ would not permit his disciples to ramble too far in the territory of the Gerasenes; for amongst them were some of that country. One asked his permission to go and perform the last duties to his father,—another wanted to go and embrace his family; but Jesus harshly refused their requests. The one received for answer, that he ought to "let the dead bury their dead." The other, that "whoever having laid his hand to the plough, and looks back, is not fit for the kingdom of heaven." The incredulous think they perceive in these answers a proof of the rough habit, repulsive and despotical spirit of Jesus, who, under pretext of the kingdom of heaven, obliged his disciples

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to neglect the most sacred duties of morality. But Christians, docile to the lessons of their divine master, which they dare not examine, have made perfection consist in a total abandonment of those objects which nature has rendered dearest to man. Christianity seems intended only to create discord, detach men from every thing on earth, and break the ties which ought to unite them. There is, according to Christ's maxims, *but one thing needful*, namely, to be attached to him exclusively: a maxim very useful, in meriting heaven, but calculated to destroy every society in the world.*

After our missionary had spent some time in the country of the Gerasenes, where it appears he kept incog, one day towards the evening he passed over to the other side of the lake, having previously dismissed the people, who had come that day on purpose to hear him; but he did not preach. Jesus, fatigued, fell asleep on the passage, whilst a furious tempest overtook the ship. His affrighted disciples, impressed with the

* Notwithstanding the eulogies lavished by Christians on the precepts of their divine master, some of them are wholly contrary to equity and right reason. When Jesus says, "Make to yourselves friends in heaven of the mammon of unrighteousness," does he not plainly insinuate, that we may take from others wherewithal to give to the Church? Divines will say, that he spoke in parables; these parables, however, are easily unfolded. In the mean while, this precept is but too well followed. Many Christians cheat and swindle during all their lives, to have the pleasure of making donations, at their death, to churches, monasteries, &c. The Messiah at another time treated his mother extremely ill, when she was seeking him with the most parental solicitude. He commanded his disciples to steal an ass; he drowned a herd of swine, &c. It must be confessed that these things do not agree extremely well with good morality. *Christianity Unveiled*, p. 147-8.

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idea of their master being more powerful when awake than when asleep, acquainted him with the danger. This conduct drew on them reproaches for their want of faith, while it probably gave time to the tempest to subside. Then Jesus, in the tone of a master, commanded the sea to be still, and immediately the order was obeyed. Yet, in spite of this prodigy, the faith of the disciples was still for a long time wavering. Jesus on this returned immediately to the country of the Gerasenes, without having either preached or performed miracles on the other side.

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CHAPTER VII.

JESUS CURES TWO PERSONS POSSESSED WITH DEVILS—MIRACLE OF THE SWINE—WONDERS PERFORMED BY CHRIST TILL THE END OF THE FIRST YEAR OF HIS MISSION.

JESUS, landed again in the country of the Gerasenes, took a route by which no person had for some time passed. Two demoniacs, inhabiting the tombs in the neighbourhood, rendered this passage dangerous. Scarcely had Christ shewn himself, when these two madmen ran to meet him. As he was a connoisseur in matters of possession, he no sooner perceived them than he began to exorcise, in order to make the unclean spirit come out of them. Notwithstanding his divine skill, he acquitted himself very imperfectly on this occasion. It was not with one devil, but with a legion of devils he had to deal. One of them, laughing at the mistake of the Son of God who asked him his name, answered, *I am called Legion.* On this Jesus changed his batteries, and was proceeding to dislodge them, when the devils, obstinate in continuing in the country, or very little desirous of returning to hell, proposed a capitulation. One of the articles bore, that, on leaving the body of the possessed, they should enter into a herd of swine, which fed hard by on the declivity of a hill. Jesus readily agreed, for once, to grant something on the prayer of the devils, and not use his

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authority rigorously. Neither he nor his disciples, as good Jews, ate pork; he reckoned, therefore, that swine prohibited by the law of Moses, might well serve for a retreat to devils. He consented to the treaty; the demons came out of their former residence to enter into the swine, who, feeling Satan within them, were thrown into commotion, or perhaps were terrified in a very natural manner; and having precipitated themselves into the sea, were drowned to the number of about two thousand.

If a legion of devils is composed of the same number as a Roman legion, we must believe, that there were six thousand devils. This evidently make three devils for each hog, a sufficient number to induce them to commit suicide.

Some grave authors assure us, that Jesus never laughed, nor even smiled;* yet it is very difficult to believe, that the Son of God could preserve his gravity after performing such a trick. But it did not appear humorous to the herdsmen, who found this fine miracle

* M. Fleury, in the *Mœurs des Chretiens*, p. 14. ed. 1601, speaking of Jesus Christ, employs these remarkable words:—"He was very grave. He was seen to weep on two occasions, but it is not related that he has laughed: not but he has smiled sweetly, as St. Chrysostom remarks." As men are accustomed to regard God as a very malignant being, and not understanding raillery, they require gravity in all who come on his service. The more gloomy a religion is, the more it pleases men, who love to indulge fear. To succeed, reformers must always display an austere exterior. Devotees prefer a harsh and morose confessor to an easy one; a preacher who excites terror is always certain of success. The Jansenists are reformers, who strive to bring back Christians to their primitive gloom, and who would succeed in reviving the fanaticism of the apostolic times, if the world was not altered.

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so little pleasant, that they complained of it to their masters, and ran to the city, where the affair was no sooner known, than the proprietors of the swine, far from being converted, bewailed a prodigy so ruinous to them, and maintained that it was a matter of public concern. The Gerasenes went in a body to oppose the entry of Jesus into their city, and, from inability to punish, besought him to leave their territory as soon as possible. Such was the effect which the miracle of the swine produced.

This memorable transaction must be true, for it is attested by three evangelists, who, however, vary in some circumstances. St. Matthew informs us, that the possessed were two in number: Mark and Luke maintain that there was only one, but so furious, according to St. Mark, that they could no longer bind him *even with fetters*. St. Luke is certain that the devil frequently carried him into the deserts; St. Mark affirms that he spent days and nights in the tombs, and on the neighbouring mountains.

On this occasion Jesus was also proclaimed Christ by the devil. As he was among his friends, or disciples, at the time, he did not enjoin silence to Satan. The acknowledgment was useful when given in private, and could not hurt him; but there were occasions on which it might do harm if made in public, where our puissant miracle-worker evinced circumspection, especially when he did not perceive himself sufficiently supported.

Unbelievers pretend to discover important errors, and evident marks of falsehood in the narrative, which also appears ridiculous. 1st, They are surprised to see devils, who, according to Christians, are condemned to eternal torments in hell leaving it on pur-

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pose to take possession of the inhabitants of this earth. 2dly, There is reason to be astonished at seeing the devil address prayers to the Son of God. It is an article of faith, among Christians, that to pray, grace is requisite; that the damned cannot pray; and much more so, that this grace must be denied to the chiefs of the damned, 3dly, The incredulous are offended at a miracle by which Jesus benefited two persons possessed with devils, at the expence of the proprietors of two thousand swine, to whom this miracle cost at least four thousand pounds sterling; an action not quite agreeable to the rules of equity. 4thly, We cannot conceive how Jesus, whom their law inspired with a horror towards swine, could have herds of animals which among them were of no use, and which they could not even touch without being defiled; and, 5thly, It is indecorous to make the Son of God enter into a compromise with devils; ridiculous to make them enter into swine; and unjust to make them enter into and destroy other people's property.

Moreover, we are not informed what became of these devils after being precipitated into the sea. There is reason to believe, that, in coming out of the swine they entered into the Jews, to procure for our Saviour the pleasure of casting them out again; for the curing of people possessed was of all miracles that in which he was most expert.

With respect to the possessed person cured by Jesus, penetrated with gratitude to his physician, with whom he was perhaps previously acquainted, he wanted to follow Christ, according to St. Mark; but it was foreseen that his testimony might become suspicious, if he put himself in the train of the Messiah, who therefore chose rather that he should repair to his family, and

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announce the mercies he had received from the Lord. He was a native of Decapolis, a country, as we have seen, very much disposed to credulity. Accordingly, as soon as the man had there recounted his adventure, every body was transported with admiration.—We are, however, astonished at the difference of disposition between these folks, so remarkable for a docile faith, and the Gerasenes:—the inhabitants of Decapolis believe all without seeing any thing, whilst the Gerasenes, eye-witnesses of the prodigy, are not moved by it, and uncivilly refuse Jesus admittance into their city. We commonly find in the gospel, that to witness a miracle is a very strong reason for not believing it.*

The hardness of heart and unbelief of the Gerasenes, and particularly the request they made the Messiah not to enter among them, obliged him to re-embark with his disciples, and return to Galilee, where he was very kindly received. It is not, however, related whether

* If the Christians cite Jerusalem, and the testimony of all Galilee, to prove the miracles of Christ, I see them attested only by an ignorant populace; or I demand, how it could be possible that an entire people, who had been witnesses to the miracles of Christ, should consent to his death, and even earnestly demand it? Would the people of London or of Paris suffer a man who had raised the dead, restored the blind to sight, and healed the lame and paralytic, to be put to death before their eyes? If the Jews demanded the death of Jesus, all his miracles are at once annihilated in the mind of every unprejudiced person.—*Boulanger.*

Let it not be said that the miracles of Christ are as well attested as any fact in profane history, and that to doubt them is as ridiculous as to doubt the existence of Scipio or of Cæsar, which we believe only on the report of the historians by whom they are mentioned. The existence of a man, of the general of an

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he preached and performed miracles; even the time he continued there is not accurately known.—The friends of Jesus, and the relations of his disciples and mother, received, as it appears, from time to time, intelligence of his wonders, which they took care to circulate: and, on learning that they wanted him, he returned to Capernaum. Scarcely was his arrival known, when the people, always fond of sermons and miracles, resorted to him in crowds. Neither his house nor the space before the door could contain the multitude; he required the voice of a Stentor to make himself heard at the extremities of the crowd; but perhaps the idlers, content with following him without knowing why, were but very little troubled about understanding his orations.

The pharisees, to whom Jesus' success began to give umbrage, resolved to satisfy themselves, if there was any reality in what was reported of him. To clear up the matter, some doctors of Galilee, who were not of the number of our missionary's admirers, repaired to him. They heard him preach, and came from his sermons more prepossessed against him; even his miracles could not convert them. Yet, according to St. Luke, the power of the Lord was displayed in their presence in the cure of the sick. But, as has been remarked, the

army, or an hero, is not improbable; neither is this a miracle. We believe the probable facts, while we reject with contempt the miracles recounted by Titus Livius. The most stupid credulity is often joined to the most distinguished talents. Of this the Christian religion furnishes innumerable examples. In matters of religion, all testimony is liable to suspicion. The most enlightened men see but ill when they are intoxicated with enthusiasm, and dazzled by the chimeras of a wild imagination. A miracle is a thing impossible in the order of nature. If this be changed by God, he is not immutable.—*ibid.*

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miracles of the Messiah were calculated to convince those only who did not see them. Thus it is, that these miracles are believed at present by people who would not credit those performed in their presence.

Four men who carried a paralytic on his bed, unable to penetrate through the crowd to Jesus, were advised to mount up with the burden to the roof of the house, and making an opening there, to let down the sick man in his bed, and lay him at the physician's feet.—The idea appeared ingenious and new to the latter; accordingly, addressing the sick man, "My son," said he, "be of good courage, thy sins are forgiven thee."* This absolution or remission was, no doubt, pronounced so as to be heard by the emissary doctors, who were

* It is upon passages in the Bible similar to this, that the Catholic clergy have founded the practice of absolution. To maintain, says Boulanger, the abject and fanatic ideas, with which the priest has filled his pupils in their childhood, he commands them to come frequently, and deposit in his bosom their hidden faults; their most secret actions and thoughts. He obliges them to humiliate themselves at his feet, and render homage to his power; he frightens the criminals, and afterwards, if they are judged worthy, he reconciles them to God, who, on the command of his ministers, remits their sins. The Christian sects that admit this practice, boast of it as extremely useful in regulating the manners, and restraining the passions of men; but experience proves, that the countries in which this usage is most faithfully observed, are distinguished rather for their dissolute lives than the purity of their manners. By such easy expiations they are only emboldened in vice. The lives of Christians are circles of successive offences and confessions. The priesthood reap the profit of this practice, by means of which they exercise an absolute dominion over the consciences of mankind. How great must be the power of an order of men, who possess all the secrets of families; who can kindle at pleasure the destructive flame of fanaticism; and open or shut the gates of heaven at will!

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very much offended at it. Jesus, sagaciously divining their dispositions, addressed his discourse to them– "Why do you suffer wicked thoughts to enter into your hearts? which is easier to say to this paralytic, thy sins are forgiven thee; or to say to him, Arise, take up thy bed and walk?" This question, boldly proposed, in the midst of a fanatical people, the sport of prejudice, embarrassed the doctors, who did not think proper to answer it. Jesus, profiting by their embarrassment, said to the paralytic, informed of the part he had to play, *Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thine house.*—This prodigy impressed their minds with terror: it especially made our doctors, the spies, tremble, while the people exclaimed, "Never have we seen before, any thing so wonderful."

But if the doctors were afraid, they were not converted; and notwithstanding the cure of the paralytic, they had no faith in the absolution granted by Jesus, It may, therefore, be supposed that this miracle was attended with circumstances which rendered it suspicious; perhaps the gospel itself will enable us to discover them.

We shall first observe, that when the same fact is differently related by different historians equal in authority, we are constrained to doubt it; or, at least, are entitled to deny that it has happened in the manner supposed. This principle of criticism must apply to the narratives of our inspired writers, as well as to those of others.—Now, St. Matthew tells us merely, that a paralytic was presented to Jesus, who cured him, without relating the wonderful circumstance of the roof being perforated, and the other ornaments with which St. Mark and St. Luke have embellished their narrative. Thus, either we are in the right in suspend-

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ing our belief as to this fact, or we may believe at least, that it has not occurred in the manner related by the two last evangelists.*

In the second place, Mark and Luke, who say that the sick man was elevated on his bed to the top of the house in which Christ was, having previously informed us the crowd was so great that the bearers of the diseased were unable to force their way through it, suppose, without expressing it in words, another very great miracle. This operation presupposes, that the carriers penetrated through the crowd. Arrived, we know not how, at the foot of the wall, they could not singly, and far less loaded with the sick man, clamber up to the roof of the house. Luke says, they made an opening through the tiles. In that case the people must have perceived them; and particularly those in the inside of the house. During the silent attention they no doubt lent to the discourse of Jesus, they must of necessity have heard the noise made by the men in raising up a bed to the roof, and afterwards uncovering this roof and making a hole in it, through which to convey the sick man.—This operation became more difficult still, if the roof, instead of being covered with tiles, was flat.—Now, all the houses of the Jews and orientals were, and still are, covered in this manner. All these difficulties furnish sufficient motives for doubting this grand miracle. It will become more probable, if we suppose that the sick man was already in the house with Jesus; that things were previously arranged, and that they let down, by a trap-door made on purpose, a paralytic most certain of being cured on command of the Messiah. This transaction might appear marvel-

* Compare as to this history, St. Matthew ix. St. Mark v. and St. Luke v.

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lous to a populace disposed to see prodigies every where, but it made less impression on the doctors, who had come on purpose closely to scrutinise the conduct of our adventurer. They conjectured, that it was dangerous to contradict weak fanatics, but they did not, for all that, credit the miracle they had witnessed.

Some days thereafter, Jesus went and preached along the sea coast, and passing near the custom-house, perceived Matthew, one of the officers, who sat there. His mien pleased the Messiah, on whose invitation our subaltern financier quitted his post, and followed him, after having in the first place given a great entertainment to Jesus and his party. Matthew presented to him as guests, publicans, and toll-bar officers, his brethren, and others of similar repute; but the Pharisees and doctors, who watched the behaviour of Christ, came purposely to Matthew's house to be assured of the fact. Jesus, occupied no doubt with gratifying his appetite, did not at first observe that he was watched. Some words, however, spoken rather loudly, attracted his attention; it was the doctors who reproached the disciples with drinking and eating with persons of doubtful reputation. "How," probably said they to them, "how dares your master, who constantly preaches up virtue, sobriety, and repentance, shew himself publicly in such bad company? How can he associate with knaves, monopolizers, and men whom their extortions render odious to the nation? Why does he carry in his train women of bad lives, such as Susan* and Jane,

* It appears, notwithstanding all his gravity, that the ladies were the foible of Jesus: melancholy persons are not the least susceptible of this weakness. He was very ardently loved by Mary Magdalene, who appears to have been the model of condescending devotees, or debauched females, whose tempera-

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who accompany him continually?" The disciples, stunned in this manner, knew not well how to reply; but Jesus, without being disconcerted, answered them with a proverb:—"It is not the whole," said he, "but the sick, who have need of a physician." After this, he cited a passage of scripture, which cannot now be found—"Learn," said he to them, "the truth of this saying, *I love mercy better than sacrifice.*" It appears, the doctors did not consider themselves defeated, and Jesus was so transported with passion as to say, that he "came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." In that case, why did he reject the Pharisees and doctors, whom he called *whitened sepulchres?* Either the adversaries of Jesus were righteous, or they were sinners whom he was come to call to repentance, and consequently he ought not to have renounced them.

Whatever reason Jesus might employ to palliate or justify his conduct, it was very soon published abroad. John Baptist's disciples who heard it, and whom perhaps jealousy excited, came in search of him, and asked the reason of the difference in the life he and his disciples led, and that which they themselves followed. We fast (said they) continually, whilst you and your followers make very good cheer. We practise austerities, and

ment usually leads them to give themselves up to religion, with as much passion after their conversion, as they did before to the world and their lovers. The Albigenses maintained, that Magdalene had a criminal complaisance for the Saviour.—*Vide* La Christiade, tome i. The Faculty of Theology, at Paris, gravely decided, in 1620, that Mary Magdalene, Mary, the sister of Lazarus, and Mary the courtezan, were one and the same lady: but the Sorbonne has since then changed its opinion, and pretends, that these are three very different Marys.—See Bernard, Nouvelles de la Repub. des Lettres, tome 21. p. 200. ib. tome 32. p. 140.

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live in retirement, whilst you run about incessantly, and frequent the company of persons of evil repute, &c. The reproach was embarrassing, but Jesus got himself off very well. "The friends of the bridegroom, (replied he,) ought neither to fast nor live in sorrow, whilst they have the bridegroom with them: a time will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them; and then they shall fast. No man putteth a piece of new cloth on an old garment—neither do men put new wine into old bottles:—and no person asks for new wine when he can get old, for he finds the old better." John's disciples had no reply to reason so sublime and convincing. It appears that Jesus, whose example is followed by our modern doctors, easily got out of this affair by the aid of an enigmatical symbol, or pompous bombast, very proper arguments to shut the mouths of those who are not inclined to dispute eternally about what they do not understand.

This incident demonstrates, that the Pharisees and doctors were not the only persons who were offended with the conduct of Jesus, and the company he frequented; a truth confirmed by the gospel.* We must observe that this trait in the conduct of Christ plainly decides the cause in favour of the partizans of lax morality, and furnishes them with victorious arms against the modern puritans. We may also remark that the actions and expressions of Jesus, on this occasion, authorise and justify the conduct and language of our holy guides, and especially our lords the bishops, who,

* St. Matthew ix. St. Mark ii. St. Luke v. and especially the epistles, are ascribed to St. Barnabas, in which that apostle says expressly, that the "apostles, whom the Lord chose, were very wicked men, and above all sinners iniquitous."

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when reproached with their iniquitous behaviour, shut our mouths by averring that *we ought to do as they tell us, and not what they do !**

It cannot be denied, that the discrepancy, which existed between the conduct of Jesus and the principles adopted by the Jews, or even in his own doctrine, required great miracles to prove his mission. Our missionary was not ignorant of this; prodigies, therefore, were commonly the strongest of his arguments, and of a nature well calculated to gain the vulgar, who never pique themselves on reasoning, but are

* In almost all ages complaints have been made of abuses in the church, and reformation has been *talked* of. Notwithstanding this pretended reform in the heads of the church, it has always been corrupted. Avaricious, turbulent, and seditious priests, have made nations groan under the weight of their vices, while princes were too weak to bring them to reason. These enlightened men, says Mirabaud, who call themselves the ministers of the Most High, frequently preach nothing but hatred, discord, and fury, in his name. The Divinity, far from having an useful influence over their own morals, commonly does no more than render them more ambitious, more covetous, more hardened, more obstinate, and more proud. In those countries where their empire is established in the most solid manner, and where they enjoy impunity, are they then enemies to that debauchery, that intemperance, and those excesses, against which they are constantly declaiming? On the contrary, do we not see them emboldened in crime; intrepid in iniquity; giving full scope to their irregularities, to their vengeance, to their hatred, and to their suspicious cruelties? The priests are generally the most crafty of men, and the best of them are truly wicked. Of the clergy, it was justly remarked by Boulanger, that while those blood-suckers of society wallow in an abundance, shameful to the states by whom they are tolerated, the man of talents, the man of science, and the brave warrior, were suffered to languish in indigence, and poorly exist on the mere necessaries of life.

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ready in every thing to side with the man who exhibits wonders, and acquires the secret of gaining their fancy.

After Jesus had silenced John's disciples, the chief of a synagogue waited on the Saviour, and besought him to come and lay hands on his daughter, twelve years old, *who was dead*, according to St. Matthew, but who was only *very sick*, according to St. Mark and St. Luke: a difference which seems to merit some attention. Jesus complied with the invitation; and whilst proceeding to the house overheated himself so much, that a virtue went out of him fit to cure all those who were in its atmosphere. We shall not form conjectures on the nature of this virtue or divine transpiration; we shall only remark, that it was so potent as suddenly to cure a woman afflicted for twelve years with an issue of blood; a malady which probably the spectators had not better verified than its cure. On this occasion Christ perceived that there had gone out of him a considerable portion of virtue; he, therefore, turned towards the female afflicted with the piles, whom his disciples had rudely pushed back; and seeing her prostrate at his feet, "Daughter, (said he to her,) be of good heart, thy faith hath made thee whole." The poor woman, whom the disciples had intimidated, charmed with being relieved from her fright in so easy a manner, confessed openly she was cured.

When our miracle performer was arrived at the house of Jairus, (such was the name of the chief of the synagogue,) they came and announced to the latter that his daughter had expired a moment before, and that the house was full minstrels, who were already performing a dirge or mournful concert, according to the custom of the country. Jesus, who on the way had got the father of the girl to prattle, was not discon-

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certed at the news; he began with making every body retire, and then having entered alone, by the virtue of some words raised her from the dead.

In historical matters we must prefer two writers who agree, to a third who contradicts them. Now Luke and Mark affirm that the damsel was dead; but here unfortunately it is the hero himself who weakens his victory. On their saying to him that she was dead, he affirmed that she was only asleep. There are girls who at twelve years of age are actually subject to such swoons. On the other hand, the father of the damsel appears to have acquainted the physician with the condition of his child; and he, more in the secret than others, did not believe the intelligence of her death. He entered alone into her chamber, well assured of her recovery if she was only in a swoon: if he had found her dead in reality, there is every reason to believe, he would have returned, and told the father that he had been called when too late, and was vexed at the accident.

Jesus, however, did not wish that this miracle should be published;—he forbade the father and mother of the damsel to tell what had happened. Our charlatan was not solicitous to divulge an affair which might more and more excite the indignation and fury of the Jews of Jerusalem, whither he was soon after to repair, on purpose to celebrate the passover.—Moreover, the account of this miracle seems to evince that the Son of God had acquired some smattering of medicine in Egypt. It appears at least that he was versant in the spasmodic diseases of women; and no more was wanted to induce the vulgar to regard a man as a sorcerer, or performer of miracles.

Once in the train of operating wonders, Jesus did not

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rest satisfied with this one. According to St. Matthew, who alone relates the three facts we are going to mention, two blind men who followed him began to exclaim, *Son of David, have mercy on us.* Though Jesus, in his quality of God, knew the most secret thoughts of men, he chose to be *viva voce* assured of the disposition of the sick people with whom he transacted. He therefore asked, if they had much faith, or if they sincerely believed that he was able to do what they requested of him. Our blind folks answered in the affirmative; then touching their eyes, "Be it unto you," said he, "according to your faith," and instantly they received their sight.

We know not how to reconcile such lively faith in two blind men, with the untractableness afterwards displayed. Their physician, who might have good reasons for not being known, most expressly forbade them to speak of their cure; they however spread it instantly through the country. The silence of those who were witnesses of this great miracle, is not more astonishing than the indiscretion of the blind men who were the objects of it.

A fact more miraculous still is the obduracy of the Jews, who were so stubborn, that the many wonders, performed one after another, and on the same day, were not able to convince the doctors. Nevertheless, Jesus, far from being discouraged, determined still further to exhibit a specimen of his power. A dumb man, possessed with a devil, was presented to Christ, who expelled the demon out of him, and the dumb began to speak. At sight of this miracle, the people, as usual, were in extasy, whilst the Pharisees and doctors, who had also exorcists among them, saw nothing surprising in it: they pretended that their exorcists performed

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their conjurations in the name of God, whilst Jesus made his in the name of the devil. Thus they accused Christ of casting out the devil by the devil, which was indeed a contradiction. But this contradiction did not prove the divinity of Jesus; it proved only that the Pharisees were frequently capable of talking nonsense and contradicting themselves, like all superstitious and credulous people. When theologists dispute, we very soon discover that the wranglers on both sides alike speak nonsense: and by contradicting themselves, impugn their own authority.*

* Dom. La Taste, a celebrated Benedictine of the Molinist party, wrote some letters against the pretended miracles of the Deacon Paris, which he ascribed to the operation of the devil. His zeal was rewarded with a bishoprick; his partizans did not perceive, that the arguments which this monk employed in combating the miracles of a Jansenist, destroyed, by a rebound, the miracles of Jesus Christ, which were less amply attested, than those of Paris. A Swiss and Protestant clergyman has also attacked the miracles of Pythagoras, Apollonius Thyaneus, and the Seraphic St. Francis, in a manner which equally destroys all those Christians have inserted in the gospel. See the book intitled, *De miraculis quæ Pythagoræ, &c. tribuntur libellus, auctore Phileleuthero Helvetio*, Duaci, 1734, in 8vo. The famous Woolston composed a work under the name of "Discourses on the Miracles of Jesus Christ," 2 vols. 1769, in which he proves, that even according to the fathers of the church, all the miracles of Christ are only allegories. Mr. Woolston's discourses were so eminent for the *lucidus ordo* in argumentation, incontrovertible reasoning, and inflexible justice, that the secular arm was employed to crush him: thus, a man, of the most blameless manners, whose literary labours in theology divines and bishops strove in vain to refute, became an illustrious example of the persecuting spirit of churchmen, whose intolerant and sanguinary dispositions, while seconded by the temporal power, (thus reciprocally aiding each other) no pleas of humanity or sacred justice can controul.

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CHAPTER VIII.

OF WHAT JESUS DID DURING HIS ABODE AT JERUSALEM; THAT IS, AT THE SECOND PASSOVER IN HIS MISSION.

OUR doctor had closed the first year of his mission in a very glorious manner. He repaired to Jerusalem with a view to try his fortune, gather the fruit of his labours, or form a party in the capital, which he hoped to carry, after having acquired adherents in the country.—There was, indeed, every reason to believe, that the noise of the wonders which he had operated the year preceding, in Galilee, would produce a lively effect on the populace of Jerusalem, but it produced consequences very opposite to those which Jesus had hoped for or foreseen. It might be said that the infernal legion which he had commanded to pass into the swine of the Gerasenes, had fixed their abode in the heads of the inhabitants of the country. The gospel shews us in the former only an incredible hardness of heart. In vain Christ wrought before their eyes a multitude of prodigies, calculated to confirm the wonders related to them; in vain did he employ his divine rhetoric to demonstrate, in the clearest manner he was able, the divinity of his mission; all his efforts served only to redouble the choler of his enemies, and induce them to devise means to punish a man, whom they persisted in regarding as a juggler, a charlatan, and a dangerous impostor.

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It is true, the adversaries of Jesus surprised him sometimes at fault—They reproached him with violating the ordinances of a law venerated by them as sacred, and from which he had promised never to depart—They regarded these violations as a proof of heresy, and it did not enter their heads that a God could raise himself above ordinary rules, and possess the right of changing every thing. They were Jews—and, therefore, obstinately attached to their divine ordinances; and they did not conceive how a true messenger of God could allow himself to trample under foot, what they were accustomed to regard as sacred and agreeable to the Deity.*

* The Jews, the most superstitious nation on earth, relying upon the supposed promise of their God, have always expected the coming of a monarch or conqueror, who is to elevate them from disgrace, and crown them with triumph. It was impossible for them to see this deliverer in the person of Jesus; who, instead of being the restorer of the Hebrew nation, was its destroyer, and since whose coming they seem to have lost all favour with God. To those who assert that this destruction, and the dispersion of the Jews, is a proof of the truth of Christian prophecy, it is answered, that it was easy to foretel the dispersion and destruction of a restless, turbulent, and rebellious people, who were continually torn and convulsed by intestine divisions; besides, they had been often conquered and dispersed. The temple destroyed by Titus, had previously suffered the same fate from Nebuchadnezzar, who carried the captive tribes into Assyria, and spread them throughout his territories. The dispersion of the Jews is more perceptible than that of other conquered nations, because those nations have generally, after a certain time, become confounded with their conquerors; whereas the Jews refuse to intermingle, by domestic connections, with the nations where they reside, and have religiously maintained this distinction. It is different with the Guebres or Parsis of Persia and Indostan, as well as the Armenians who dwell in Mahometan

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So many obstacles did not discourage Jesus. He determined to succeed at any price; and though without a miracle he might have foreseen what would be the issue of his enterprise, he was sensible he must conquer or die; that fortune favours only the brave; and that it was necessary to play an illustrious part, or tamely consent to languish in misery, in the solitude of some obscure village in Galilee.

On arriving at Jerusalem, he devoted his first cares to sick paupers—the rich had their own physicians. At this time there was in the city, and near the sheep port, a fountain, or famous pool, of which, however, with the exception of the Gospel, no historian has ever spoken, though, from its properties, it well deserved to be transmitted to posterity. It was a vast edifice, round which stretched five magnificent galleries, in the centre of which was a sheet of water, that possessed admirable properties—but these were known only to poor people and mendicants, and they knew them doubtless by a particular revelation. Under these galleries were seen languishing a great number of wretches, who patiently waited for a miracle. God, on giving to the water of this pool the faculty of curing all diseases, had annexed a condition to it—The first who could plunge therein after an angel had troubled it, which happened only at a certain time, could alone

countries. The Hebrews remain dispersed, because they are unsocial, intolerant, and blindly attached to their superstitions. Moreover, the Acts of the Apostles clearly prove, that the Jews began to be dispersed, even before the time of Jesus. Jews came from Greece, Persia, Arabia, &c. to the feast of Pentecost. Acts ii. 8. It was, in fact, only the inhabitants of Judea that were dispersed by the Romans, after the death of Christ.—*Christianity Unveiled*, p. 83-5.

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obtain the benefit of a cure. The chief magistrate of Jerusalem, who probably knew nothing of the existence of this marvel, had not established there any regulation of police. The most forward and agile of the paralytics or sick, and such as had friends always in readiness to throw them into the water when it was troubled, ravished, often very unjustly, the mercy of being delivered from their diseases.

A paralytic, among others, had been there for thirty-eight years, without any body having had the charity to lend him a helping hand in descending to the fountain. Jesus, who beheld him lying on his bed, asked him if he wanted to be cured? "Yes," answered the sick man, "but I have nobody to put me into the water when it is troubled." "That signifies nothing, (replied Jesus)—Arise, take up thy bed and walk." This wretched man, perhaps, not unlike many of our beggars, who, to soften the public, feign diseases they do not labour under, and who on this occasion might be gained over by some trifle to be accessary to the farce;—this miserable, we say, did not leave him to speak twice—on the order of Jesus he took up his couch and departed.

Among the Jews, however, they did not, as among us, promenade on festival days. This cure was performed on the Sabbath. Our paralytic having been met by a man of the law, the latter reprimanded him, for violating the ordinances of religion by carrying his bed. The transgressor had no other excuse to give, but that he who had cured him had at the same time commanded him to do this. He was then questioned about the person who had given this order, but he knew nothing of him. Jesus had not said who he was; and, as if the action had been very

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ordinary, the person on whom the miracle was performed had not informed himself of the author of it.—Here the matter ended, as they made no further enquiry. But Jesus having sometime after met the paralytic, made himself known to him, and then the latter informed the Jews of the name of his curer. These Hebrews were so irritated, that from this instant they formed the design of getting Christ put to death, because, according to St. John, *he had done these things on the Sabbath day.**

Nevertheless, it is not probable that this was the true cause of the rage of the Jews. However scrupulous we suppose them, it is presumed that their physicians and surgeons did not think themselves obliged to refuse medicines to the sick on the Sabbath. There is reason to believe, that Jesus, not content with curing, did moreover order those he cured to violate the Sabbath by carrying their bed, which was a servile work: or rather these unbelievers regarded the miracles of the Saviour as mere delusions, impostures, tricks of dexterity, and himself as a cheat, who might excite disturbances.

Jesus having learned that the Jews were ill disposed towards him on account of the transaction of the Sabbath, which they accused him of violating, attempted to justify himself. He made a fine discourse, tending to prove that he was the Son of God, and that his Father authorised him not to observe the Sabbath. But he took care not to explain himself very distinctly on this *filiation;* and by his ambiguous language, he insinuated the eternity of his father, but did not call him God. Yet the Jews divining his object, were very much offend-

* St. John v. 1—16.

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ed at this pretension.* He changed, therefore, his batteries, and threw himself on the necessity by which he acted. "Verily, said he to them, the Son does nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do. The Father, who loves him, sheweth him all things that he himself doeth, and he will shew him greater works than these." By these expressions Christ seems to overthrow his own eternity and infinite knowledge; for he announces himself as susceptible of learning something, or as the ape of the Divinity.

To impress the minds of these unbelievers, whom his enigmatical jargon could not convince, he declared that henceforth the Father will no longer intermeddle in judging men, but had devolved that care on his Son. This, however, had no effect; as the Jews expected a great judge, they were not yet staggered. Jesus, like our Christian teachers, for want of better arguments, took the resolution to intimidate his audience, knowing well that fear always prevents the exercise of reason. He gave them, therefore, to understand, that the end of the world was near, which ought to make them tremble.†

The testimony of John-Baptist, had, as we have

* St. John v. 17. &c.

† The second coming of Christ, immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem, attended with all the signs and concomitants of the end of the world, is announced both in Matthew and in Luke; and from these, and other parts of the New Testament, it appears, the disciples were told, that they were to be present on that occasion, either alive or raised up from the dead. That generation was not to pass away until all these things were fulfilled, and both heaven and earth should sooner fail than this prediction. Jesus expressly said, on sending forth his disciples to preach the gospel, "ye shall not have gone over all the cities of Judah, until the Son of Man be come." The apostles there-

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seen, facilitated the first successes of Jesus; but on the other side, the difference they had remarked between the conduct of the latter, and that of the forerunner, destroyed the force of this testimony; our orator pretended therefore to have no need of it, and strove even to weaken its value. *He was a burning and a shining light* to them; *you were willing for a season to rejoice in his light; I have a greater witness than his.* Here he appealed to his works, which he maintained to be infallible proofs of his divine mission. He undoubtedly forgot at this moment, that he spoke to people who regarded his marvellous deeds as delusions and impostures; his works were precisely the thing which it was necessary to prove even to the very Jews, who saw them performed! Yet this manner of reasoning has been since adopted with success by Christian doctors, who, when doubts or objections are advan-

fore called it the *last times*, and *the end of the world.* The event having belied the prediction, the successors of the apostles were willing to give another interpretation to the words of Jesus; and, therefore, instead of the destruction of the world being implied in these predictions, they, by a facility peculiar to the clergy, when they find themselves involved in any difficulty, gave out that Christ only spoke in reference to a grand millenium, which he was about to establish on the earth. Accordingly, of this opinion we find Cerinthus in the first century, and from him it was transmitted to Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, by oral tradition of the early Christians. It was also embraced by Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Tertullian, Hippolitus, Lactantius, Theophilus of Antioch, Methodus, Victorinus, and the most illustrious of the ancient fathers. Something might be offered in excuse for these primitives adopting this fanatical notion; but he ought only to be regarded as an insane person, who, at the end of the eighteenth century, can give the smallest credence to so absurd and ridiculous a story.

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ced against the mission of Jesus, throw themselves immediately on his miraculous works, which were at all times incapable of convincing the very persons who they tell us had been witnesses of them.

Among the proofs employed by Christ to exalt his mission, he advanced one, the only tendency of which is to destroy the mission of Moses, and make him be regarded as an impostor. He told them, *You have never heard the voice of my Father;* whilst it was on the voice of this Father, of whom Moses was the interpreter, that all the law of the Jews was founded. However, after having thus annihilated the authority of scripture, our orator wished further to prop his mission on the same scriptures, by which, according to him, he was announced. "Fear," says he, "the Father; I will not be the person who will accuse you before him; it will be Moses, in whom you trust, because you believed not in him; for if you believed in him, you would also believe in me.* I am come in the name of the Father, and you pay no attention to it; another will come in his own name, and you will believe in him."

The hearers of this sermon were not moved by it:

* Notwithstanding this testimony in favour of Moses, what confidence can be placed in the pretensions of a man to divine inspiration, who, after asserting he wrought so many miracles, could not convert his people from idolatry; and who, after having caused forty-seven thousand Israelites to perish by the sword, had the effrontery to assume the title of the meekest man on earth? Is it certain that the books which are attributed to Moses, and report so many miraculous circumstances, are perfectly authentic? and what proof have we of his mission, except the testimony of a number of superstitious, ignorant, and credulous Israelites, who were evidently the dupes of this ferocious legislator?

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they found it unconnected, contradictory, offensive, and blasphemous; the fear of seeing the end of the world arrive, did not hinder them from perceiving the want of just inference in the orator, who took away from his Father, and restored to him the quality of judge of men, which he had at first appropriated to himself. Besides, it would appear, the Jews were of good courage as to this end of the world, which events had so often belied. Their posterity, who beheld the world subsisting after this, notwithstanding the express prediction of Jesus and his disciples, have founded their repugnance for his doctrine, among other things, on this want of accomplishment; and from his sublime discourse the incredulous conclude, that it is very difficult for an impostor to speak long without contradicting and detecting himself.

The inefficacy of this harangue made Jesus perceive, that it was in vain to prosecute the plan of miracles, in order to draw over to his party the Jews of Jerusalem. He forebore therefore to perform them, though the circumstance of the festival of the passover would seem to furnish him with a very favourable opportunity. It even appears he was completely disgusted with the incredulity of these wretches, who showed themselves no ways disposed to witness the great things, which he had exhibited with success to the inhabitants of Galilee. To see miracles, there must be a simplicity, more rare in a capital than in the country; besides, if the populace are well disposed even in large cities, the magistrates and best informed persons commonly oppose a bulwark against credulity.*

* We have heard of the populace running to the miracles of M. Paris, and believing them; we have even heard persons of distinguished rank, and women of quality, persuaded of their re-

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The same thing happened to our thaumaturge in Jerusalem. Perhaps he despaired of the salvation of these infidels, for during the short space of time he sojourned in that city, he kept no measures with them; he loaded them with abusive language: but it does not appear that this plan gained proselytes, though since that time his disciples and the priests have frequently endeavoured to succeed by the like means, and even by coercion.*

ality, attest them openly; but these miracles were never able to conquer the incredulity of the Molinist clergy, of the government, nor the police; and the latter, as every body knows, succeeded in putting an end to the miracles of the Most High. This occasioned the following epigram, posted upon the gate of the church-yard of St. Medard at Paris.

De par le roi, defense a Dieu,
De faire miracle en ce lieu.

The king commands that God shall not
Work more miracles on this spot.

God was obedient; he no longer performed miracles for the Jansenists, but with shut doors, and in the garrets of the street Moufetard.

* It is right to remark, says Mirabaud, that the religion of the Christians, which boasts of giving the justest idea of the Divinity; which exhibits that Divinity on the side of goodness and mercy, when his worshippers are accused of being turbulent and sanguinary; which prides itself on having taught the purest system of morality; which pretends to have established concord and peace for ever amongst those who possess it;—it is well, I say, to remark, that this religion has caused more divisions and disputes—more political and civil wars, and more crimes of every species, than all the other religions in the world united. If it is said that the progress of learning will prevent this superstition from producing in future such dismal effects: it is answered, that fanaticism will be always dangerous; and that unless the cause be removed,

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In short, in this journey, Jesus had no success—his disciples did not meet with good cheer; to sustain life they were reduced to the necessity of taking a little corn in the environs of the city; and were surprised at this occupation on the Sabbath day.—The violation of the law appeared to the Jews a greater crime than theft. In vain complaint was made to their master; from him no satisfaction could be obtained. He beat off the Pharisees, by comparing what his disciples had done with the conduct of David, who himself, on an emergency, ate, and also made his followers eat, the shew-bread, the use whereof the Lord reserved for the priests alone:* adding, that "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath;" therefore, he concluded, "that the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath."†

Critics have remarked in several circumstances of the life of our man God, that his humanity was frequently liable to commit mistakes. For example, on the occasion we speak of, he gave the name of Abiathar to the high priest, who permitted David to eat the shew bread. The Holy Ghost

the effects will ever be the same. So long as superstition shall be held in consideration, and shall have power, there will be disputes, persecutions, inquisitions, regicides, disorders, &c.—so long as mankind shall be so irrational as to consider religion as a thing of the first importance, its ministers will have an opportunity of confounding every thing on earth, under the pretence of serving the Divinity, that is, of promoting their own interests: The Christian church has only one way of wiping away the accusation brought against it, of being intolerant and cruel, namely, solemnly to declare, "that it is not allowable to persecute or injure any one for his opinions." But this is what the clergy will never declare.

* 1 Kings, or Samuel xxi. 5.

† St. Matt. xii. St. Mark ii. St. Luke vi.

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however informs us, in the first book of Kings, that this high priest was called Achimelech. The error would be nothing if an ordinary man had fallen into it, but it becomes embarrassing in a man-God, or in God made man, whom we ought to suppose incapable of blunders.

On the same occasion, Jesus, to justify the conduct of his disciples, maintained that the priests themselves violated the Sabbath, by serving God in the temple on that day; and this, according to the principles of our theology, is styled visibly confounding *servile* works with *spiritual.* But this is to have the same idea of a robbery and of the oblation of a sacrifice; it is to tax God with being ignorant of what he did, by ordaining, at one and the same time, the observance and the violation of a day which he had consecrated to repose.

Our doctors further justify Christ, with saying, that, as God, he was absolute master of all things; but in that case he ought to have procured better cheer to his disciples. It would not have cost him more to have permitted them to encroach on the table of some rich financier of Jerusalem, or even that of the high priests, who lived at the expence of God his father, than to permit his disciples to forage in the fields of the poor inhabitants of the country. At least it was previously necessary to verify such sovereignty over all things in the eyes of the Jews, who, from not knowing this important truth, were naturally offended at the conduct which the Son of God seemed to authorise. It is apparently on this principle several Christian doctors have pretended, that *all things appertain to the just;* that it is permitted them to seize on the property of infidels and the unholy; that the clergy have right to levy contributions on the

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people; and that the Pope may dispose of crowns at his pleasure. It is on the same principle that actions are defended, which unbelievers regard as usurpations and violence, exercised by the Christians on the inhabitants of the new world. Hence we see, that it is of the utmost importance to Christians not to depart from the example which Jesus has given them in this passage of the gospel; it appears especially to interest the power of the Pope and the rights of the clergy.

Pretensions, so well founded, did not, however, strike the carnal minds of the Jews; they persisted in believing that it was not permitted to rob, particularly on the Sabbath; and not knowing the extent of the rights of Jesus, they took him for an impostor, and his disciples for knaves. They believed him to be a dangerous man, who, under pretence of reforming the Hebrews, sought only to subvert their laws, trampled on their ordinances, and strove to overturn their religion. They agreed, therefore, among themselves, to collect the proofs they had against him, accuse, and cause him to be arrested; but our hero, who had information of their designs, frustrated them by leaving Jerusalem.

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CHAPTER IX.

JESUS WORKS NEW MIRACLES.—ELECTION OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES.

AS soon as Jesus had secured himself from the malicious intention of his enemies, he again betook himself to the working of miracles, with a view to give fresh proofs of his mission to persons of more favourable dispositions than the inhabitants of Jerusalem. His experience convinced him, that to gain the capital, it was still necessary to augment his forces in the environs, and procure in the country a great number of adherents, who might, in due time and place, aid him in vanquishing the incredulity of priests, doctors, and magistrates; and put him in possession of the holy city, the object of his eager desires.

These new prodigies, however, produced no remarkable effect. The Jews, who had been at Jerusalem, during the festival of the passover, on returning home, prepossessed their fellow-citizens against our adventurer. If he found the secret of gaining the admiration of the people in the places he passed through on leaving the capital, he had the chagrin to find opponents in the Pharisees and doctors of these places. The following fact shows to what a degree the people were prepossessed.—On a Sabbath day, Jesus entered into the synagogue of a place, the name of which has not been preserved.—He found there, perhaps, by

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chance, a man who had, or said he had a withered hand. The sight of the diseased, who was probably some noted mendicant and knave, and the presence of the physician, excited the attention of the doctors. They watched Jesus closely—"Let us see, (said they, one to another) if he will dare to heal this man on the sabbath day." But observing that Jesus remained inactive, they questioned him on the head of the sabbath, of which, on so many occasions, he had appeared to make but little account. It was apparently one of the principal points of his reform. He was perhaps sensible, like us, of the utility of abrogating a great number of festivals. Be that as it may, the doctors asked him, "Master, is it lawful to heal on this day?" Christ was frequently in the habit of answering one question by another: —Logic was not the science in which the Jews were most conversant. Jesus replied to them, "Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath day, or to do evil? —to save life, or to take it away?" This question, according to St. Mark, confounded the doctors. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe, unless we suppose the Jews to have been a hundred times more stupid than they really were, that this question was very ill timed. They were prohibited from applying to servile occupations only, but must have been permitted to discharge the most pressing obligations of morality even on the sabbath day. It is to be presumed, that a midwife, for example, lent her ministry on that day, as on every other.*

* See in chap. xii. a note taken from the Talmud, proving that it was permitted to anoint the sick with oil on the Sabbath day, for their relief. The Essenians observed the Sabbath with so much rigour, that they did not allow themselves on that day to satisfy the most pressing wants of life. This perhaps gave

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Jesus continued his questions, and asked them, if when a sheep fell into a ditch on the sabbath day, they would not draw it out? From hence, without waiting for an answer, he very justly concluded that it was permitted to do good on the sabbath. To prove it, he said to the sick, whom he had perhaps suborned to play this scene in the synagogue, "Arise, stand up, and stretch forth your hand;" and immediately his hand became as the other. But Jesus, remarking that this prodigy operated no change in their minds, darted a furious look on the assembly, and, boiling with a holy choler, instantly forsook the detestable place.*

He acted wisely; for these naughty doctors went immediately, and took counsel with the officers of Herod, "how they might destroy him." Jesus, who was informed of every thing by his adherents, gained the sea shore, where it was always easy for him to effect his escape. His disciples, several of whom understood navigation, followed him thither. A multitude of people, more credulous than the doctors, repaired to him on the noise of his marvels. There came to him hearers from Galilee, from Jerusalem, from Idumea, from the other side Jordan, and even from Tyre and Sidon. This multitude furnished him with a pretext for giving directions to his disciples to hold a bark in readiness, that he might not be too much thronged, but in truth to escape, in case it should be attempted to pursue him.

On this shore, favourable to his designs, Jesus performed a great number of miracles, and cured an infi-

occasion to the reproaches with which the Jews loaded Jesus on that head, who had reformed this ridiculous custom by his own authority.

* St. Matt. xii. St. Mark vi. and xii.

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nity of people unknown; we must piously believe it on the word of St. Matthew and St. Mark.* All these wonders were performed on the sick, and especially on the possessed. The latter, at whatever distance they perceived the Saviour, prostrated themselves before him, rendered homage to his glory, and proclaimed him the Christ; whilst he, always full of modesty, commanded them with threats not to reveal him; the whole to accomplish a prophecy, which said of him, *He shall not dispute nor cry, nor make his voice be heard in the streets*;†—a prophecy, which, however, was frequently contradicted by his continual disputes with the doctors and Pharisees, and by the uproar he frequently occasioned in the temple, the streets of Jerusalem, and the synagogues in the neighbourhood.

Nothing is more astonishing than the obstinacy of the devil, in acknowledging Jesus, and confessing his divinity, and the stubbornness of the doctors in not recognizing him, in spite of his cares to make the one silent to convince the other. It is evident, that the Son of God has come with the sole intent of preventing the Jews from profiting by his coming, and acknowledging the titles of his mission; it may be said that he has shewn himself merely to receive the homage of the devil; at least we perceive only Satan and his disciples proclaiming aloud the quality of Jesus.

When Christ had preached much, cured much, and exorcised much, he wished to be alone for some time, to reflect on the situation of his affairs. With a view to enjoy more liberty, he went up into a mountain, where he spent the whole night. The result of his solitary reflections and prayers was, that he stood in

* St. Matt. xii. St. Mark iii. St. Luke vi.
† Isaiah xlii. 2.

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need of assistants; but that he could no longer, without giving umbrage to the government, continue marching up and down with a company so numerous as that of the idlers which he dragged after him in his suite.

When day appeared, he called his disciples, at least those among them whom he judged most worthy of confidence, and selected twelve to remain near his person.* This is what St. Luke says; but St Mark insinuates that he chose his twelve apostles on purpose to send them on a mission. As Jesus himself however assures us, that he chose them *to be near him*, and as the apostles, content with begging and making provision for themselves and their master, did not perform any mission during the life of Jesus, at least out of Judea, we will adhere to the first opinion.

The names of these apostles were as follows;—Simon Peter, Andrew, Matthew, Simon-Zelotes, James, Philip, Thomas, Jude, John, Bartholomew, another James, and Judas Iscariot the treasurer.

Jesus had not money to give such of his disciples as he was about to send on missions: he told them no doubt to go and push their fortune.—He, however, took care to impart to them his secrets, teach them the art of miracles, and give them receipts to cure diseases and cast out devils; in short, he communicated to them the power of remitting sins, to bind and to unbind in the name of heaven; prerogatives, which, if they did not enrich the apostles, have been worth immense treasure to their successors. To the latter, the roughest staff has become a *crosier*, a staff of command, making its power felt by the most puissant sovereigns of the

* St. Luke vi. 13. St. Mark iii. 13.

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earth. The *bag* or *wallet* of the apostles has been converted into treasures, benefices, principalities, and revenues; permission to beg has become a right to exact tenths, devour nations, fatten on the substance of the wretched, and enjoy, by *divine right*, the privilege of pillaging society, and disturbing it with impunity. In fine, the successors of these first missionaries sent by Jesus Christ, became mendicants who enjoyed the prerogative of knocking down all those who refused to bestow charities on them, or to obey their commands. Many people have imagined, that Jesus never concerned himself about the subsistence of the ministers of the church; but if we examine attentively the gospel, and especially the Acts of the Apotles, we shall there find the basis of the riches, grandeur, and even despotism of the clergy.* It is

* The independence of the Christian clergy is founded upon the principles of their religion. Of this circumstance they have taken care to profit; and, impressed with this idea, they, after being enriched by the generosity of kings, have always proved ungrateful to the true sources of their own opulence and privileges.—What this body had gained through surprise or impudence, it was found impossible to recover from their hands. They foresaw that future generations, breaking loose from the fetters of prejudice, might tear from them the donations they had gained, by extortions of terror, and the evils of imposture; they therefore persuaded mankind, that they held from God alone, what had been given them by their fellow mortals; and by a miracle of credulity they were believed on their word. Thus the interests of the clergy became separated from those of society. Men devoted to God, and chosen to be his ministers, were no longer confounded with the profane laws, and civil tribunals renounced all power over them. They could be judged only by members of their own body. Hence the greatest excesses were often committed by them with impunity; and their persons, at the dis-

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never but to benefit themselves and their confidents, that impostors devise reforms, or institute sects.

posal of God alone, were sacred and inviolable. Though they contributed nothing to public charges, or at least no more than they pleased, their possessions were defended and enlarged by fanatic sovereigns, who hoped thereby to conciliate the favour of heaven. In fact, those reverend wolves in shepherds' clothing, under pretence of feeding with instruction, devoured with avarice; and secure in their disguise, fattened on the blood of their flocks, unpunished and unsuspected.—*Christianity Unveiled.*

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CHAPTER X.

SERMON ON THE MOUNT—SUMMARY OF THE MORALITY OF JESUS—OBSERVATIONS ON THAT MORALITY.

THE dread of being arrested having constrained Jesus to abandon the cities, where he had too many enemies, the country became his ordinary residence. The people, affected by his lessons, or at least some male and female devotees whom he had converted, furnished provisions to the divine man and his followers. Obliged to wander about incessantly, bury themselves in mountains and deserts, and sleep in the open air, our apostles became frequently discontented with their lot; and this kind of life, compared with that which had preceded it, must have appeared to them very distressing, and often create murmurs. In spite of the multitude of spiritual graces, which they could not fail to receive in the society of the Messiah, these carnal men expected something more substantial on devoting themselves to his service. They were doubtless promised important posts, riches, and power in the kingdom he was about to establish. Jesus on this account frequently experienced almost as much difficulty in retaining them, as in convincing the rebellious Jews by his miracles and fine arguments. The measure of their appetite, and well being, was at this time the only rule of their faith. To prevent their murmurs, and familiarize them with a frugal life, which our mis-

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sionary saw he would be obliged perhaps for a long time to come to make them lead, he pronounced an oration on true happiness: it is the one known by the name of the Sermon on the Mount, and related by St. Matthew, chap. v.

According to our orator, true happiness consists in *poverty of spirit*, that is, in ignorance, and contempt of a proud knowledge, which bids us exercise our reason, and strips man of that blind submission, which is necessary to induce him to snbmit to a guide. On this occasion, Jesus preached to his apostles and the surrounding multitude, a pious docility which implicitly credits every thing without examination;* and

* Men, says Boulanger, blindly follow on in the paths which their fathers trod; they believe, because, in infancy they were told they must believe—they hope, because their progenitors hopid; and they tremble, because they trembled. In youth the ardour of our passions, and the continual ebriety of our sense, prevent us thinking seriously of a religion too austere and gloomy to please. If, by chance, a young man examines it, he does it with partiality, or without perseverance; he is often disgusted with a single glance of the eye, on contemplating an objet so revolting. In riper age, new passions and cares, ideas of ambition, greatness, power, the desire of riches, and the hurry of business, absorb the whole attention of man, or leave him but few moments to think of religion, which he never has the leisure to scrutinize. In old age, the faculties are blunted, habits become incorporated with the machine, the senses are debilitated by time and infirmity, and we are no longer able to penetrate back to the source of our opinions; besides, the fear of death then renders an examination, over which terror commonly presides, very liable to suspicion. Civil authority also flies to the support of the prejudices of mankind; compels them to ignorance, by forbidding enquiry; and holds itself in continual readiness to punish all who attempt to undeceive them.

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shewed them, that the kingdom of heaven would be the reward of this happy disposition. Such is the sense which the church has always given to the words of Jesus, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Among the apostles, there were some whose passionate dispositions might have been prejudicial to the progress of the sect; it may in general be presumed that rough men devoid of education, have repulsive manners. Jesus demonstrated to them the necessity of meekness, civility, and patience, in order to gain proselytes, and attain his ends; he recommended to them moderation and toleration, as the certain means of insinuating themselves into the minds of men, and thriving in the world, and as the surest way of making conquests. This is the true sense of these words, *Happy are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*

Wishing afterwards to inspire them with courage, and console them for their miserable situation, he gave them to understand, that to live in tears is felicity, and an infallible method of expiating iniquity. He promised them that their vexations should not endure for ever; that their tears should be dried up; that their misery should terminate, and that their hunger should be appeased. These consolations and promises were indispensably necessary, to fortify the apostles against every accident which, in the course of their enterprises, might befal them, in the retinue of a chief destitute of riches and power, and incapable of procuring to himself or others the comforts of existence.

Jesus, with a view, no doubt, of sweetening the lot of his apostles, recommended compassion to the listening multitude, of which he, as well as his party, stood in the greatest need. It is indeed readily

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perceived, that the Messiah felt the most imperious necessity to preach up charity to his auditors, for he lived only on alms, and his success depended obviously on the generosity of the public, and the benefactions of the good souls who hearkened to his lessons.

The preacher recommended peace and concord, dispositions indispensably necessary to a new born, weak, and persecuted sect; but this necessity ceased to operate, when this sect had attained strength enough to dictate the law.

He afterwards fortified his disciples against the persecutions which they were to experience; he addressed himself to their self-love, spurring them on by motives of honour: "Ye are (says he) the salt of the earth, the light of the world." He gave them to understand that they were the "successors of the prophets," men so much respected by the Jews; and to share in whose glory, they ought to expect the same crosses which their illustrious predecessors heretofore experienced. In fine, he called on them to regard it as a felicity, and most worthy of heavenly rewards, to be hated, persecuted, contemned, traduced, and to be deprived of every thing that is commonly regarded as constituting the well-being and happiness of man.

After having thus fortified his disciples against the misfortunes which would attend their mission, he addressed himself more particularly to the people. He presented to them a new morality, which, so far from being totally repugnant to that of the Jews, could easily be reconciled with it. Things were not as yet sufficiently matured for abrogating entirely the law of Moses; too great changes alarm mankind. A missionary, still feeble, must at first confine himself to reforming abuses,

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without seeking to probe to the bottom.—Jesus, therefore, wisely contented himself with shewing, that the law was faulty in some places, and that he proposed to perfect it. Such is the language which all reformers employ.

Jesus accordingly expressly declared to the people, that he was not come to destroy, but to fulfil the law: and he also affirmed that, in heaven, ranks would be fixed according to the rigorous observance of all its articles. He insinuated, however, to his audience, that neither they, nor their doctors, understood any of that law which, they believed, they faithfully practised. He undertook therefore to explain it; and as all reformers pretend to puritanical austerity, and to a supernatural and more than human perfection, he went beyond the law. The following is the substance of his marvellous instructions:—

"You have (said he) heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be punished with death; but I say unto you, that it is necessary to extend this prohibition and punishment even to wrath; seeing it is wrath which pushes one on to put his fellow-creature to death.—You would punish adultery, only when it is committed; but I tell you, that, in this article, desire alone renders one as culpable as fact. You perhaps will answer, that man is not the master of his passions and desires, and that he can hardly resist them; I agree with you on this; you have not any power, even on the hairs of your head.* The penances, sacrifices, and expiations, which your priests impose on you, are not capable of

* It appears that Jesus knew not enough of theology to reconcile free will with divine decrees. This has not been since too well supplied by teaching the odious dogmas of predestina-

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procuring the remission of your sins; behold, then, the only means of preventing them, or making reparation for them. Has your eye, or any other of your members, solicited you to commit iniquity? Cut off that member, or pull out that eye, and throw it from you; for it is more expedient, that one of your members should perish, than the whole body be thrown into hell fire. If Moses, inspired by the Divinity, had known this hell or place destined for your suffering eternal punishment, he would not have failed to menace you with it; but he was absolutely ignorant of the important dogma of another life: he has therefore spoken only of the present, to which he has limited your misfortunes, or your felicity. Had it not been for this, he would not have neglected to acquaint you with a fact so well calculated to inspire you with fear, and render life insup-

tion and effectual calling, which make God the most fanatical and cruel of tyrants, by supposing that he punishes to all eternity those to whom he refuses the means or the will of saving themselves.

The doctrine of predestination was also a tenet of the Jews. In the writings of Moses a God is exhibited, who, in his decrees is partially fond of a chosen people, and unjust to all others. The theology and history of the Greeks represent men as punished for necessary crimes foretold by oracles. Of this Orestes, Œdipus, Ajax, &c. are examples. Mankind have always described God as the most unjust of beings. According to some sects, God bestows his grace on whom he pleases, without any regard to merit. This is much more conformable to the Christian, Pagan, and Jewish fatalism, than the doctrine of other sects, who say that God grants his grace to all who ask and deserve it. It is certain, that Christians in general are true fatalists. They attempt to evade this accusation, by saying, that the designs of God are mysteries. If so, why do they constantly dispute about what it is impossible for them to understand?

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* We are quite surprised at finding that Moses and the ancient Hebrew writers have no where made mention of the dogma of a future life, which now-a-days forms one of the most important articles of the Christian religion. Solomon speaks of the death of men by comparing it with that of brutes. See *Ecclesiast.* Some of the prophets, it is true, have spoken of a place called *Cheol,* which has been translated *Hell (Enfer);* yet it is evident that this word implies merely sepulchre or tomb. They have in like manner, translated the Hebrew word *Topheth* into *Hell;* but on examining the term closely, we find that it designates a place of punishment near Jerusalem, where malefactors were punished, and their carcases burned. It was only after the Babylonish captivity, that the Jews knew the dogma of another life, and the resurrection, which they learned of the Persian disciples of Zoroaster. In the time of Jesus, that dogma was not even generally received. The Pharisees admitted it, and the Sadducees rejected it. See a work under the title *L'Enfer Detruit (Hell Destroyed)* in 12mo. London, 1769.

Mahomet perceived, as well as Christian divines, the necessity of frightening mankind in order to govern them. "Those (say the Alcoran) who do not believe, shall be clothed in a garment of fire; boiling water shall be poured on their heads; their skins and their entrails shall be smitten with rods of iron. Whenever they shall strive to escape from hell, and avoid its torments, they shall be again thrust into it, and the devils shall say unto them, *taste the pain of burning.*" *Alcoran, c.* 8.

On the other hand, the Christian represents his God as pouring out unbounded vengeance to all eternity. His fanaticism feeds itself with the idea of a hell, where God, transformed into a ferocious executioner, as unjust as implacable, shall bathe himself in the tears of his wretched creatures, and perpetuate their existence to render them eternally miserable. There, cloathed with revenge, he shall mock at the torments of sinners, and listen with raptures to the groans with which they shall make the brazen roofs of their prisons resound: not the smallest hope of some distant termination of their pains shall give them an interval even of imaginary relief!

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wives; but I tell you, that you ought to repudiate them only, when you have surprized them in adultery. It is too cruel to stone one for this fault; we ought to have respect for the weakness of the sex."

Jesus, whose birth, as we have seen, was very equivocal, had particular reasons for wishing that adultery should be treated with more indulgence. Independently of Mary his mother, from whom Joseph was very probably separated, our preacher had in his train dames, whose conduct has been every thing but irreproachable, anterior to their conversion.* Besides, the indulgence which he preached, must have gained him the hearts of all the ladies in his auditory.

The Messiah continued nearly in these terms:— "God has promised you of old times blessings, prosperity, and glory; but he has changed his intention, and revoked these promises; as you were almost always, and still are, the most unhappy, the most foolish, and most despised people on earth, you ought to suspect, that these pompous promises were mere allegories. You ought, therefore, to have an abject and mortifying morality, conformable to your genius, your situation, and your misery. If it does not procure you welfare in this world, you ought to hope that it will render you more happy in the next. The humiliations you ought to make, are the certain means of attaining one day that glory, which hitherto neither you nor your fathers have ever been able to acquire. When therefore a person shall give you a blow on one cheek,

* Besides, Mary Magdalene, who was a noted courtesan, Jesus had in his suite Joanna, wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, who, according to the tradition, robbed and forsook her husband to follow the Messiah, and assist him with her property.—St. Luke viii. 3.

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offer instantly the other. Do not go to law—lawyers will ruin you; and besides, the poor are always in the wrong when opposed to the rich. Give to whoever asks of you, and refuse nothing you possess; it is by relying on the punctual practice of this important precept, that I send my disciples into the world without money or provisions."

"I do not give you any description of paradise—it is sufficient for you to know in gross, that you will be perfectly happy there. But to get there, it is necessary to be more than men—it is necessary to love your enemies;* render good for evil; preserve no remembrance of the cruellest outrages; bless the hand that strikes you; and not speak one silly word; for one only will suffice to precipitate you into hell. Have a pleasant aspect when you fast; but especially

* To *love* our enemies is impossible. A man may *abstain* from doing evil to the person by whom he is injured; but love is an affection which can only be excited in our hearts by an object which we suppose friendly towards us. Politic nations, who have enacted just and wise laws, have always forbidden individuals to revenge or do justice to themselves. A sentiment of generosity, of greatness of soul, or heroism, may induce mankind to do good to those from whom they suffer injuries. By such means they exalt themselves above their enemies, and may even change the dispositions of their hearts. Thus, without having recourse to a supernatural morality, we feel that it is our interest to stifle the desire of revenge in our hearts. Christians may therefore cease to boast the forgiveness of injuries, as a precept that could be given only by their God, or which proves the divine origin of their morality. Pythagoras, long before the time of Christ, said, "Let men revenge themselves on their enemies only by labouring to convert them into friends;" and Socrates taught, that "it was not lawful for a man who had received an injury, to revenge it by doing another injury."

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live without foresight.—Amass nothing, lest you excite the wrath of my Father. Think not of to-morrow—live at random, like the birds that never think of sowing, gathering, or accumulating provisions. Detach yourselves from all things here below—seek the kingdom of God, which I and my disciples will sell you for your charities. This conduct cannot fail to plunge you into misery; but then you shall beg in your turn. God will provide for your wants—ask, and it shall be given you. Do not the beggars find, agreeably to our divine precepts, wherewith to live at the expence of the simpletons who labour?* My disciples and I, are we not an example, evincing, that even without toil, one may draw himself out of scrapes, and never perish by hunger? If our manner of living appears not to agree with my language, I warn you that you must not judge my person, nor condemn your masters and doctors. Do not intermeddle with state affairs; that care is reserved for me, and those in whom I confide. The master is superior to the disciple—it is to me in particular you ought to listen. If you call me your master, it is ne-

* See what is said in a note on chap. iii. where the Nazarenes are mentioned. The whole Christian doctrine is favourable to mendicants, beggars, and drones. Our prelates affirm, that the property of the church is the *patrimony of the poor, who are members of* Jesus Christ. As the priests are usually the self-styled depositories and distributors of alms, they take great care to preach up charity; consequently, in very devout countries, the imbecile laity make donations to monks, and legacies to hospitals, which seem established only to be gainful to the administrators, but very little to the unfortunate. Besides, these establishments encourage idleness; a good government cannot make so many poor; it will punish mendicants by profession, and force them to work, when able, to provide for the wants of those who are really incapable.

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cessary to do what I desire you. The practice of my morality is difficult, and even impossible, to many persons; but the broad and easy way conducts to perdition; and to enter into heaven, it is necessary to be as perfect as my heavenly Father. I must warn you against my enemies, or those who shall preach to you a doctrine contrary to mine. Treat them as wolves; they are false prophets—shew them no indulgence: for it is not to them that you ought to be humane, tolerant, and pacific."

In the course of his discourse, Jesus taught them a short form of prayer, known to Christians by the name of *the Lord's prayer.** Though the Son of God may have shewn himself on this occasion the declared enemy of long prayers, the Christian church is full of pious sluggards, who, in spite of his decision, believe they cannot perform any thing more agreeable to God, than spending their whole time in mumbling prayers in a very low tone, or singing them in a very high one, and frequently in a language they do not understand. It appears, that in this, as in many other things, the church has rectified the ideas of its divine founder.

St. Matthew informs us, that the discourse, of which we have given the substance, transported the people with admiration at the doctrine of Jesus, for he instructed them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.—The latter, perhaps, spoke in a more simple fashion, and consequently less admired by the vulgar,

* M. Basnage informs us, that the Jews have a prayer called Kadish, in which they say to God—"O God, exalted and hallowed be thy name.—May thy kingdom come," &c. This prayer is the short ancient one preserved by the Jews. Hence we see that Jesus was but a plagiary, and not the author of the Lord's prayer.—Basnage Hist. des Juifs, tome 6. p. 374.

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whose wonder is excited in proportion to their inability to comprehend, or practice, the precepts given them. Thus the sermon of Jesus had not, at that time, any contradictors. It has, however, since then furnished ample scope for dispute to our casuists and theologians; they have subtilly distinguished between things which were merely of *counsel*, and those of *precept*, which ought rigorously to be observed. It was in fact soon felt, that the sublime morality of the Son of God did not suit mankind, and its literal observance became necessarily destructive to society.—It was, therefore, requisite to abate it, and recur to that marvellous distinction, in order to shelter the honour of the divine legislator, and reconcile his fanatical morality with the wants of the human race.

Moreover, this discourse presents difficulties, which will always appear very embarrassing to persons accustomed to reflect on what they read. They find, that it is ridiculous and false to say, a law is accomplished, when it is proposed and permitted to violate it, and add or retrench the most essential points. Since the time of Jesus, why has that law been completely abrogated by St. Paul and his adherents, who, as we have seen, seceded from the Christian partizans of Judaism? Why do Christians entertain at present so much horror at that same Judaism, except indeed when the privileges and pretensions of the clergy are in question—articles on which our Christian priests are very judaical, and which they have prudently borrowed from Leviticus; all to supply the neglect of Christ, who in his gospel was not sufficiently attentive either to their temporal interests, *divine rights*, or sacred hierarchy? By what law do the inquisitors (if Christians) in Portugal and Spain burn those who are accused, or con-

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victed of having observed the usages of a law, which Jesus has declared, that he did not wish to *abolish*, but to *fulfil?* By what law have Christian doctors dispensed with circumcision, and permit themselves to eat pork, bacon, pudding, hare, &c.? Why has Sunday, or the day of the sun among Pagans, been substituted for Sabbath or Saturday?

2dly, It is held unjust to punish in the same manner a man in a passion and a murderer. One may be in a passion and restrain himself, or afterwards repair the injury done; but he cannot restore life to man, whom he has deprived of it.

3dly, The restriction of divorce to the single case of adultery is a law very hard, and very prejudicial to the happiness of married presons. This precept compels a man to live with a woman, who in other respects may be odious to him. Besides, it is generally very difficult to convict a female of adultery; she usually uses precaution to avoid conviction on account of her debaucheries. Is it not very grievous, and even dangerous, to live with a person who occasions continual suspicions?

4thly, It is absurd to make a crime of desire, especially without supposing the *liberty* of man; but Jesus is not very explicit on that important article. On the contrary, from the train of his discourse he appears to recognize the *necessity* of man, who has no authority over a single hair of his head. St. Paul, his apostle, declares in many places against the liberty of man, whom he compares with a vessel in the hands of a potter.* But if there be no proportion between the workman and his work; if the latter has no right to say to the former, *why have you fashioned me thus?* if there

* St. Augustine says, that "man is not master of his thoughts."

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be no analogy between them, how can they bear any relation to each other? If God is incorporeal, how does he act upon bodies; or how can these bodies disturb his repose, or excite in him motions of anger? If man is relatively to God as an *earthen vase*, this vase owes neither thanks nor adoration to the potter who gave him so insignificant a form. If this power is displeased with his own vessel because he formed it badly, or because it is not fit for the uses he intended, the potter, if he is not an irrational being, can only blame himself for the defects which appear. He no doubt can break it in pieces, and the vase cannot prevent him; but if, instead of forming it anew, and giving it a figure more suitable to his designs, he punishes the vase for the bad qualities he has himself conferred upon it, he would shew himself to be completely deprived of reason. This, in fact, is the view which Christianity gives of its God. It represents mankind as having no more relation with the divinity than stones. But if God owes nothing to man; if he is not bound to show him either justice or goodness, man on his part can owe nothing to God. We have no idea of any relation between beings which are not reciprocal. The duties of men amongst themselves are founded upon their mutual wants. If God has no occasion for these services, they cannot owe him any thing; neither can they possibly offend him by their actions.

5thly, It is a very strange remedy to cut off or pluck out a member every time it is an occasion of scandal or sin: it contradicts the precept not to make an attempt on one's life. Origen is blamed by the Christians for having performed an operation, which he no doubt judged necessary for preserving his chas-

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tity.* It is not through the members, but the inclination, that a person sins: it is therefore absurd to say that one shall escape damnation of the body by depriving of himself a member. What would become of so many prelates and ecclesiastical libertines, if to appease the lusts of the flesh, and make reparation for scandal, they should take it into their heads to follow the counsel of Jesus?

6thly, The suppression of a just defence of one's person and rights, against an aggressor or unjust litigant, is to overturn the laws of every society. It is to open a door to iniquities and crimes, and render useless the exercise of justice. By such maxims a people could not exist ten years.

7thly, The counsel or precept, to possess nothing, amass nothing, and think not of the morrow, would be very prejudicial to families;—a father ought to pro-

* Aristotle and Epictetus recommended chastity of speech. Menander said, "that a good man could never consent to debauch a virgin, or commit adultery." Tibullus said, *casta placent superis.* Mark Antony "thanks the Gods that he had preserved his chastity in his youth." The Romans made laws against adultery. Father Tanchard informs us, "that the Siamans forbid not only dishonest actions, but also impure thoughts and desires." It thus appears that chastity and purity of manners were esteemed even before the Christian religion existed. The clergy it is true, deny this, and incessantly cry out against unbelievers and philosophers, whom they denominate *dangerous subjects.* But if we open history, we do not find that philosophers were those who embroiled states and empires. Such events were almost universally produced by the religious. The Dominican who poisoned the Emperor Henry XI. James Clement, and Ravaillac, were not unbelievers. They were not philosophers, but fanatic Christians, who led Charles I. to the scaffold. It was the priest Gomare, and not Spinosa, who set Holland on fire, &c.

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vide a subsistence for his children. These maxims can suit sluggards only, such as priests and monks, who hold labour in horror, and calculate on living at the expence of the public.

8thly, It is now easy to perceive, that the promises made the Jews by the mouth of Moses, inspired by the Divinity, have not been verified literally, and are only allegorical. But it was not from the Son of God that the Jews should have learned this fatal truth. Once deceived by the Divinity, they ought to have dreaded being again deceived by another envoy. Like Jesus, Moses had made promises; like Jesus, Moses had confirmed his promises and mission by miracles; yet these promises have been found deceptive, and merely allegorical. This idea ought to have created presumptions dangerous to the promises of Christ.*

9thly, To say that it is necessary to be *poor in spirit*, and to say afterwards that to attain heaven it is neces-

* All the first Christians, as already remarked, expected, on the word of Christ and his apostles, soon to see the end of the world, which, however, still endures. They looked, day after day, for the arrival of Christ in the *clouds of heaven;* they reckoned that he was to establish on earth a temporal kingdom, which was to endure a thousand years. Several holy doctors, among whom is St. Irenæus, have firmly believed this fable borrowed from the *golden age*, or reign of Saturn. The church, remarking that this reign did not arrive, changed its opinion on the matter, as on many others, and declared the Millenarians heretics. St. Irenæus, however, has left us a poetical description of the abundance and sensual pleasures, which this reign was to procure. St. Justin Martyr expected also this fine kingdom. See Tillemont, tome 2. p. 300. Yet we know not how to reconcile the prediction of the near end of the world made by Christ, and the ignorance he said he was in, as to the duration of the world in St. Mark xiii. 32. This ignorance appears strange indeed in a God.

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sary to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect, is to make God a stupid being; to afford to Atheists a solution for all the evil they perceive in nature; and to pretend, that to enter paradise, one must be a fool. But has man the power of being spiritual or poor in spirit, reasonable or foolish, believing or unbelieving? Is not the holy stupidity of faith a gift, which God grants only to whom he will? Is it not unjust to damn people of understanding?

Lastly, In this sermon, Jesus recommends to beware of *false prophets*, and says; that it is by their works we shall know them.—Yet as we have seen, the priests tell us, "we ought to do as they say, without imitating what they do," when we find their conduct little conformable to the maxims they preach.—It was necessary, therefore, to give us another sign than works, whereby, to recognize false prophets, or else the faithful will often be reduced to believe, that the clergy are provided only with lying prophets.

It is in this manner unbelievers argue, that is to say, all those who have not received from heaven *poorness of spirit*, so necessary for not perceiving the want of inference, false principles, and numberless inconsistencies, which most directly result from the morality of Jesus. This morality appears a divine *chef d'œuvre* to docile Christians illuminated by faith; and it was much admired by those who heard it delivered. We know not, however, if many of the auditors were so affected by it as to follow it literally; to admire a doctrine, and believe it true and divine, is a thing much more easy than to practise it. Many persons set a higher value on evangelical virtues, which are sublime in theory, than on the human virtues, which reason commands us to practise.*

* See Appendix, No. II.

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It is not then surprising, that the supernatural and marvellous morality of Jesus was applauded by those who heard it. It was addressed to paupers, the dregs of the people, and the miserable. An austere stoical morality must please the wretched; it transforms their actual situation into virtue; it flatters their vanity; makes them proud of their misery; hardens them against the strokes of fortune; and persuades them that they are much more valuable than the rich, who maltreat them; and that the Deity, who delights in seeing man suffer, prefers the wretched to those who enjoy felicity.

On the other hand, the vulgar imagine, that those who possess the faculty of restraining their passions, despising what men seek after, and depriving themselves of what excites the desires of others, are extraordinary beings, not only agreeable to God, but endowed by him with preternatural grace, without which they would be incapable of the exertions they are seen to make. Thus a harsh morality, which seems to proceed from insensibility, pleases the rabble, imposes on the ignorant, and is sufficient to excite the admiration of the simple. It is not even displeasing to persons placed in more happy situations, who admire the doctrine, well assured of finding the secret to elude the practice of it, by the assistance of their indulgent guides; there is only a small number of fanatics who follow it literally.

Such were the dispositions which must have induced so many people to receive the doctrine of Jesus. His maxims hatched a multitude of obstinate martyrs, who, in the hope of opening to themselves a road to heaven, set torments and afflictions at defiance. The same maxims produced penitents of every knd, spli-

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taries, anchorites, cenobites, and monks, who, in emulation of each other, rendered themselves illustrious in the eyes of nations by their austerities, voluntary poverty, a total renunciation of the comforts of nature, and a continual struggle against the gentlest and most lawful inclinations.* The counsels and precepts of the gospel inundated nations with a vast number of madmen, enemies of themselves, and perfectly useless to others—These wonderful men were admired, respected, and revered as saints by their fellow citizens, who, themselves deficient in grace or enthusiasm necessary for imitating them, or following faithfully the counsels of the Son of God, had recourse to their intercession, in order to obtain pardon for their sins, and indulgence from the Almighty, whom they supposed irritated at the impossibility in which they found themselves of following literally the precepts of his Son. In fine, it is easy to perceive, that these precepts rigorously observed, would drag society into total ruin, for society is supported only because that most Christians, admiring the doctrine of the Son of God as divine, dispense with practising it, and follow the propensity of nature, even at the risk of being damned.†

* To form a true idea of Christian morality, such as has been taught by the most esteemed doctors, we have only to read a work of the learned Barbeyrac, published on the subject, under the title of *Traite de la morale des peres*, in 4to. Amsterdam, 1728.

† It is several times related in Leviticus xvii. 11 and 14, that the *soul consists of the blood.* St. Paul still further obscures the question of the immortality of the soul. In his first epistle to the Thessalonians, v. 23. not content with making man double, he makes him treble, and describes him as composed of *body, soul,* and *spirit.* Thereafter he gives us to understand, that the body and soul are mortal, but that the spirit is immortal. With respect to the doctrine of the *resurrection,* scholars have shewn

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In the gospel Jesus menaces with eternal punishment those who shall not fulfil his precepts. This frightful doctrine was not contradicted in the assembly; the supersititious love to tremble; those who threaten them most, are the most eagerly listening. This was undoubtedly the time for establishing firmly the dogma of the *spirituality* and *immortality* of the soul. The Son of God ought to have explained to those Jews, but little acquainted with this matter, how a part of man could suffer in hell, whilst another part was rotting in the earth. But our preacher was not acquainted with any of the dogmas which his church has since taught. He had not clear ideas of spirituality; he spoke of it only in a very obscure manner: "Fear (said he, in one place,) him who can throw both body and soul into hell"—words which must have appeared unintelligible in a language, in which the soul was taken for the blood or animating principle. —It was not till a long time after Jesus, and when some Platonists had been initiated in Christianity, that the spirituality and immortality of the soul were converted into dogmas. Before their time, the Jews and Christians had only vague notions on that important subject. We find doctors in the first ages speaking to us of God and the soul as material substances, more subtile indeed than ordinary bodies. It was reserved for latter metaphysicians to give us such sublime ideas of mind, that our limited understandings are bewildered when employed on them.

that what the Pharisees admitted, was only a *transmigration of souls*, similar to what had been taught by Pythagoras, and not a resurrection like that of the Christians. See Prideaux Hist. des Juifs, tome 2.

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CHAPTER XI.

ACTIONS AND PARABLES OF JESUS.—ENTERPRISE OF HIS RELATIONS AGAINST HIM.—JOURNEY OF JESUS TO NAZARETH, AND THE SUCCESS HE HAD THERE.

THOUGH the obstinacy of the doctors of the law and principal men among the Jews created continual obstacles to the success which Christ had promised himself, he did not lose courage; he again had recourse to prodigies, the certain means of captivating the populace, on whom he plainly perceived it was necessary to found his hopes. This people were very subject to diseases of the skin, such as leprosy and similar cutaneous disorders. No doubt can be entertained on this point, when we consider the precautions which the law of Moses ordains against these infirmities. To establish his reputation the more, Christ resolved to undertake the cure of this disgusting disease with which his countrymen were so much infected.

According to St. Luke, a leper came, and prostrated himself at the feet of Jesus, and adored him, saying, that he had heard him spoken of as a very able man, and that, if he was inclined, he could cure him: —on this, Jesus merely stretched forth his hand, and the leprosy disappeared.* Hitherto Christ had only

* St. Luke, v. 12. St. Matt. viii. 2. St. Mark, i. 40.

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recommended it to those he cured to go and present themselves to the priests, in order to offer them the gift prescribed in such cases;* but on this occasion he thought that he would reconcile them by strictly enjoining this mark of deference; He therefore exacted of the cured leper, that he would satisfy the ordinance of the law; but at the same time recommended secrecy as to the physician's name,—a secret which was not better preserved by him than by others. Jesus forgot that it was not sufficient to impose silence on the persons he cured, but that it was likewise necessary to lay a restraint on all the tongues of the spectators; unless indeed it is supposed that these miracles were performed with shut doors, and witnessed by the Saviour's disciples only; or, rather, that they were not performed at all.

Meanwhile, the leper's indiscretion was the cause why Jesus, according to St. Mark, no longer ventured to appear in the city.† The priests seem to have taken in ill mood the cure he had performed: He therefore withdrew into the desart,‡ where the more he was followed, the more he buried himself in concealment. It was in vain that in this situation the people desired to hear him; it was in vain that the sick, who ran after him requested their cure; he no longer suffered that marvellous virtue, calculated to cure every disorder, to exhale from him.

After having wandered for some time in the desart, ruminating on his affairs, he re-appeared at Capernaum. The domestic of a Roman centurion, much beloved by

* Levit. xiv. and St. Matt. viii. 4.

† St. Mark, i. 45. ‡ St. Luke, v. 16.

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his master, was at the point of death from an attack of the palsy*. This Pagan believed that Jesus could easily cure his slave; but instead of presenting him to Christ, as he ought to have done, he deputed some Jewish senators, whom he seems to have brought from Jerusalem, to wait on the Messiah. However disagreeable this commission might be to persons whom the centurion had no right to command, and who by that step seemed to acknowledge the mission of Jesus, these senators performed it. Christ, flattered with seeing an idolater apply to him, set out immediately; but the centurion sent some of his people to inform Jesus, that he was not worthy of the honour thus intended him by entering his house; and that to cure his servant it was sufficient to speak only one word. Jesus was delighted with this; he declared, that *he had not found so much faith in Israel*; and with one word, if the Gospel may be believed, he performed the cure. He afterwards gave the Jews to understand, that if they persisted in their hardness of heart, (the only disease which the Son of God could never cure, though he had come for that purpose†,) the idolatrous nations would be substituted in their stead in the inheritance of heaven, and that God, notwithstanding his promises, would abandon his ancient friends for ever and for ever. The Gospel, however, does not tell us, whether this centurion, so full of faith, was himself converted.

The day after this cure, Jesus, having left Caper-

* St. Matt. viii. St. Luke, vii.

† We are assured that the Messiah of the Jews had been clearly predicted and designated by their own prophets; but in that case, how came the Jews not to recognize him?

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naum, arrived at Nain, a small town in Galilee, about twenty leagues distant, which proves that Christ was a

It will be answered, that the blindness of the Jews was also predicted by the same prophets who had predicted the rejection and death of the Messiah. To this I object that a wise and omnipotent God, who must always exactly adapt his means to his ends, ought to have employed a more certain and efficacious mode of deliverance for his people; but if he did not intend their deliverance (and surely to know that the scheme adopted would fail is tantamount), then it was useless to send his son, and to expose him to a certain and foreseen death. It will be said, that the corruption and wickedness of the Jews had at length exhausted the patience of the Almighty, who, although he had sworn an eternal alliance with Abraham's posterity, was now determined in consequence to break the treaty. It will be pretended that God was now resolved to reject the Hebrews, and adopt the Gentile nations, who had been the objects of his hatred for so long a period; but surely nothing can be more inconsistent with just notions of an immutable Deity, whose mercies are infinite, and whose goodness is inexhaustible. If the Messiah announced by the Jewish prophets was sent to the Jews, then ought he to have been their deliverer, and not the destroyer of their worship and nation. If it be really possible to discover any meaning in the obscure, enigmatical oracles of the Jewish prophets—if any thing can be divined in those inexplicable logographes which have been dignified with the pompous name of prophecies, we shall find that the prophets, when in a good humour, always promised the Jews an avenger of their wrongs, a restorer of the kingdom of Judea, and not an abolisher of the religion of Moses. If the Messiah was sent to the Gentiles, then was he not the Messiah promised to the Jews; he could not be the destroyer of their nation. If it be said, that Jesus himself declared he came not to abolish but to fulfil the law of Moses, then I ask why do the Christians reject the Jewish dispensation?

Thus whatever way we take it, Jesus Christ could not be the person foretold by the prophets, since it is evident that

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great walker. Fortunately he got there in time to perform an excellent miracle. A poor widow had lost her son: they were already carrying him to be buried; the disconsolate mother, accompanied by a great multitude, followed the funeral procession. Jesus, moved with compassion, approached the bier, and laid his hand on it. Immediately those who carried it stopped. *Young man!* said Christ, speaking to the deceased, *I say to thee, Arise.* Forthwith he who was dead sat up. This miracle terrified all the assistants, but converted nobody. It is proper to remark, that this transaction is related by St. Luke alone; and even if it were better verified, we might justly suspect that the disconsolate mother held secret intelligence with the performer.*

Some historians have made John Baptist live to this period; others made him die much earlier. Here St. Matthew and St. Luke introduce the disciples of the precursor, on purpose to question Jesus on the part of their master†. "Art thou he that was to come, or look

he came to abolish the Jewish dispensation, which, though instituted by God himself, had become obnoxious to him. If this mutable Deity, tired with the worship of his chosen people, had at last repented of his injustice to the Gentiles, it was properly to them that he should have sent his son. He would, in that case, have spared his ancient friends the horrid crime of deicide, which he obliged them to commit, by not teaching them to know whom he had sent. The Jews surely were excusable for not discovering their Messiah in a Galilean mechanic, destitute of the characters ascribed to him by their own prophets, and who contributed neither to their happiness, nor to their deliverance.—*Preservative against Religious Prejudices,* Lond. 1812.

* St. Luke, vii. 11—17.

† St. Matt. xi. 2. St. Luke, vii. 18—22.

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we for another?" The Messiah in reply worked miracles in their presence, cured the sick, cast out devils, and gave sight to the blind; after which he said to John's deputies, "Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen*." It was on this occasion that Jesus pronounced the eulogy of John. He had, as we have seen in chapter fourth of this history, his reasons for doing so. "Amongst all those," said he, "that are born of woman, verily I say unto you, there is not a greater than John Baptist." Our panegyrist profited afterwards by this circumstance to abuse the Pharisees and doctors, who rejected both his baptism and John's. He compared these unbelievers to "Children sitting in the market place, and calling to one another, we have piped to you, and you have not danced; we have chanted funeral airs, and ye have not weeped." But we are not informed whether this jargon converted the doctors†.

After this our speech-maker compared his own conduct with that of the precursor. "John," said he, "came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say he hath a devil. I drink, eat and love good cheer, yet you reject me also, under pretence that I am a drunken sot and a debauchee; and that I frequent the company of men and women of bad reputation."

He gave the populace, however, to understand, that their suffrage was sufficient for him; as if he had told them, "I am certain of you—you are too *poor in spirit* to perceive of yourselves the irregularity of my conduct—my wonders especially pass with you; you should not reflect; you are the true *children of wisdom, which will be justified by you*‡."

* St. Matt. xi. 11. † St. Luke, vii. 18, 22.
‡ St. Matt. ii. 11. St. Luke, vii. 33. St. Luke, vii. 34—5.

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After this harangue, a Pharisee, who, to judge of him by his conduct, had been noways moved by Jesus, invited the orator to dinner; but he used Christ in the most unpolite manner. He did not cause his feet to be bathed, nor did he present perfumes, according to the established custom of the Jews towards every person. Though the self-love of Jesus might be offended at this omission, he did not decline sitting down at table; but while he was eating, a woman of bad fame bathed his feet with her tears, wiped them with her beautiful hair, and thereafter anointed them with a most precious perfume. The Pharisee did not comprehend the mystery. As stupid as incredulous, he conjectured that Jesus did not know the profession of the female; but he was grossly mistaken: the courtezan in question and all her family were intimately connected with Christ. St. John informs us, that she was called Mary Magdalane, and that she was the sister of Martha and Lazarus, people well known to Jesus, and who, as we shall very soon see, held a regular correspondence with him. In particular it appears, that Magdalane entertained the most tender sentiments for the Son of God.

This action of the courtezan did not disconcert the Saviour; he explained her love, the cares she rendered him, and the kisses with which she loaded him, in a mystical and spiritual sense; and assuming the tone of one inspired,* he sent her away, telling her that her

* It is for want of being acquainted with the true causes of the passions, the talents, of poetical rapture, of drunkenness, &c. that these qualities have been deified under the names of Cupid, Apollo, Esculapius, Bacchus, Furies, Terror and a fever have equally had altars, and man has

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sins were forgiven on account of the love she had displayed. St. Luke informs us in the chapter following, that Jesus had delivered this lady of *seven devils*—a service which doubtless merited all her gratitude. Be that as it may, Christ employed this indirect way of shewing the Pharisee the incivility of his behaviour to a man of his consequence.

The relations of Jesus, informed of the noise he made, and suspecting that he could not lead a very pure life amongst the gentry with whom he associated; or fearing that his conduct in the end would draw him into some unlucky affair, went from Nazareth to Capernaum on purpose to seize him, and cause him to be confined. They were evidently afraid of being involved in his disgrace, and chose rather to charge themselves with the correction of their kinsman, than see him delivered up to justice; an event which they foresaw was likely very soon to happen. They therefore circulated a rumour, that he was a fool whose brain was disordered.

believed that he ought to attribute to some divinity all those effects which he could not account for. This is the reason why dreams, hysteric vapours, and swimming in the head, have been looked upon as divine inspirations. The Mahometans have still a great respect for fools. The Christians regard a trance as the favour of heaven; they call visions those things which others would call folly, giddiness, and derangement of the brain. Women who are hysterical and subject to vapours, are the most subject to vision and to extasies. Penitents, and monks who fast, are most exposed to receive the favours of the Most High, or to have fantastical dreams. According to Tacitus, the Germans believed that women had something of the Divinity. Amongst the savages, it was women who excited them to war. The Greeks had their Pythons, their Sibyls, and their Prophetesses.

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Jesus, informed of their arrival and the motive of their journey, kept close in his quarters, and had a prodigy in reserve for the moment they should appear. The people who had got a hint of this, or were told beforehand by the emissaries of the Messiah, repaired thither in a crowd. As soon as the relations appeared, a blind and dumb man possessed with a devil was brought forth: Jesus exorcised him, the possessed was delivered, and the people were in admiration.

The doctors beheld with pain the credulity of the rabble, and foresaw the consequences of it.—The kinsmen of Jesus, little affected by this miracle, promised to the doctors to use all their efforts to deliver up to them so dangerous a man.—He is a sorcerer, said some: he is a prophet, said others; he must prove it, said a third; and, notwithstanding the great miracle he had performed, others added, *Let us ask of him a sign in the air?* "Good God," said the Nazarenes, "he is neither sorcerer nor prophet; we know him better than any body; he is a poor lad whose brain is disordered."

All these speeches were related to Jesus; he answered them by parables and invectives, and defended himself from the charge of being a wizard, by saying it was absurd to maintain that he cast out devils by the power of devils. As to the imputation of folly, he repelled it with affirming that whoever should attack him on the score of understanding, could not expect the remission of his sins either in this or in the other world. This undoubtedly is what must be understood by the *Sin against the Holy Ghost.*

Nevertheless the midway course of demanding a sign was followed; for this purpose a deputation was sent to Jesus; but instead of a sign in the air he gave

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them one in the water. He referred our inquisitive folks to Jonas, and told them they should have no other; for, added he, " As Jonas was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." The Jews, who were neither wizards nor prophets, could not comprehend this language. Jesus, to whom miracles cost nothing when every thing was arranged for performing them, did not risk himself by working them *impromptu*, or in the presence of those whom he judged acute enough to examine them.—On this occasion he put off these poor Jews, whom he calculated on converting to himself for ever, with an unintelligible answer.

The refusal to perform a prodigy in the air creates a belief that Jesus declined the contest: raillery was introduced: the Son of God got into a passion, and launched out in prophetical invectives against the Jews. He compared the conduct of the queen of Sheba with theirs; boasted of his being greater and wiser than Solomon; and threatened to deprive them of the light which he shed in their country. We are of opinion however, that, if he had deigned to consent to give the sign demanded, he would have spread this light much further.—But there is reason to believe the Messiah felt that a sign in the air was much more difficult than all those he had given on the earth, where he was better able to arrange matters than aloft in the atmosphere, a region in which there was nobody to concert with.

Meanwhile Jesus' mother had joined her other children and relations in order to soothe and engage them to desist from their pursuits, but she could not prevail on them. They persisted in the design of taking up

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our adventurer; but as they could not penetrate through the multitude and get close up to him, they sent notice they were there. "Behold," said some one to Jesus, "thy mother and thy brethren who seek thee."—Christ knowing the object of their visit which he was no ways eager to receive, abjured such froward relations: "Who is my mother, and who are my brethren?" said he; after which, stretching forth his hand towards the people, "*Behold*," added he, "*my mother, and my brethren*; I know no other kinsmen than those who hearken to my word, and put it in practice." The people, flattered with the preference, took Jesus under their protection, and the attempt of his family was thus turned to their confusion*.

Escaped from this perilous adventure, afraid of being caught unawares, or mistrusting the constancy of the populace, who, notwithstanding the pleasure they found in seeing him perform his juggles, might desert him at last, Jesus thought proper to provide for his safety by leaving the town†. He accordingly departed with his twelve apostles, the ladies of his train, Mary his mother, Jane and Magdalane, *who assisted the company with their property*. There is reason to believe that the last, who, before she was with the Messiah, had made gain of her charms, was rich in jewels and ready money. This rendered her conversion of great importance to the sect, and especially to Jesus, who could not, without cruelty, refuse to repay so much love with a little return.

The persecution which Jesus experienced excited an interest in his behalf, and it would seem procured

* St. Matt. xii. 46. St. Mark, iii. 12. St. Luke, viii. 19.
† St. Matt. xiii. 1.

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him greater countenance. A multitude of people impelled by curiosity, as soon as they knew the road he had taken, went out of the towns and hamlets in the environs to see him. To avoid being incommoded by the crowd, he again resolved to go on board a vessel; and having done so, he began to preach to those on shore; but recollecting the scrapes which his former sermons had brought him into, he did not think it prudent to explain himself so clearly; he, therefore, preferred speaking in parables, which are always susceptible of a double meaning. It may be believed the explication of these enigmas was circulated by means of the apostles, to whom Jesus gave it in charge*.

One day, chagrined at his little success, he distinctly avowed that he had changed his resolution as to the Jews, and meant to abandon their conversion. The reason for doing so he expressed to them in parables; "that seeing," said he, "they may not perceive, and hearing they may not understand, lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.†"

It must be owned, that it is very difficult to reconcile this conduct of God. Were we not afraid of committing sacrilege by hazarding conjectures on the mission of Jesus, might it not be presumed that at first he had the design of giving laws to the Jews, but perceiving afterwards his little success, he resolved, as he began to be disparaged in that country, to seek his fortune elsewhere, and gain other subjects? What he entrusted to his disciples in this secret interview, appears to have been for the purpose of preparing them

* St. Mark, iv. 10. † St. Mark, v. 12.

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for this change; but his punishment prevented all his designs, which were not executed till a long time after by his apostles, who no doubt carefully treasured up this conference.

We should not enter into a detail of all the parables which Jesus employed in communicating his marvellous doctrine to the Jews, or preaching without being understood. Such a discussion would become very tiresome; we therefore advise those who may have taste for such kind of apologues rather to read those of Esop or La Fontaine, which they will find more amusing and more instructive than the fables of Christ. Those, however, who wish to consult the parables or apologues of the gospel, will find them in the following places:—

The parable of the *sower*, Luke, viii. 5—of the *concealed lamp*, ib. viii. 16—of the *tares*, Matt. xiii. 24—of the *seed*, Mark iv. 26—of the *grain of mustard*, Matt. xiii. 31—of the *leaven*, ib. xiii. 33—of the *hidden* treasure, ib. xiii. 44—of the *pearl*, ib. xiii. 45—of the *net cast into the sea*, ib. 47—and of the *father of the family*, ib. 52.

Jesus informed that his brothers and cousins were from home, went to Nazareth accompanied with his apostles. He perhaps wanted to convince his countrymen that he was not such a fool as was reported. Probably he hoped to confer with his family, and gain them over to his side. He arrived on the sabbath, and repaired to the synagogue: immediately the priests very politely presented him with a book; he opened it, and stumbled precisely on this passage of Isaiah: "The spirit of the Lord has rested upon me, and therefore I am anointed to preach." Having shut the book,

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he delivered it to the priest and sat down; but he did not neglect to apply to himself this passage of the prophet, where also mention is made of miracles and prodigies. There were present, either by chance or design, several Galileans, who having been witnesses of the marvels he had performed the year preceding, did not hesitate to bear testimony in his favour. But the Nazarenes, who knew what to think of Jesus, were shocked at his magisterial tone. "Is not this," said they to one another, "the carpenter, the son of Joseph the carpenter? Is not his mother called Mary? Are not his brethren and sisters with us? Whence then has he so much skill? How and by what means does he work the miracles related to us?"

Jesus, hearing these discourses, saw plainly that this was not the proper place for performing prodigies.—But he wished that his inaction might be attributed to the evil dispositions of his countrymen, who were surprised to hear the sagacity and power of a man vaunted, whose conduct appeared to them very equivocal. "I see well," said Jesus to them, "that you apply to me the proverb, Physician cure thyself; and that, to prove the truth of the marvels you have heard of me, you wish me to perform some of those fine leger-demains which I have elsewhere exhibited; but I know I shall labour in vain in this city: I am too well convinced of the truth of the proverb, No man is a prophet in his own country." To justify himself he quoted examples which would seem to throw a suspicion on the miracles of the prophets of the Old Testament, whom this proverb, even by itself, was calculated to make pass for knaves. Whatever opinion we may form of this, he cited the example of Elias, who,

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among all the widows of Israel, did not find one more deserving of a miracle than her of Sarepta, a woman of the country of the Sidonians. In the days of Elias Judea was overrun with lepers; and yet the Prophet cured Naaman, who was a Syrian and an idolater, in preference to his countrymen.

This harangue, which tended to insinuate the reprobation and perversity of the audience, put them into ill humour, and excited their rage so much, that they dragged the orator out of the synagogue, and led him to the top of a mountain with an intention to throw him down headlong; but he had the good fortune to escape, and thus avoid the fate which was intended him in the place of his nativity.

St. Matthew, speaking of this journey to Nazareth, says that his master did not perform many miracles there on account of the unbelief of the inhabitants. But St. Mark says positively, that he *could not do any*, which is still more probable.*

Our luminous interpreters and commentators believe, that Jesus escaped only by a miracle out of the hands of the Nazarenes. But would it have cost him more to perform a miracle in order to convert them, and thereby prevent their mischievous designs? This was all that was required of him, and then he would not have stood in need of performing a miracle in order to save himself and place his person in security. Jesus never performed miracles but with certain loss; he always dispensed with working any, when they would have been decisive.

* Compare on this fact, St. Matt. xi. 11. St. Mark, vi. St. Luke, iv. and viii.

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CHAPTER XII.

MISSION OF THE APOSTLES. THE INSTRUCTIONS JESUS GAVE THEM. MIRACLES WROUGHT BY HIM UNTIL THE END OF THE SECOND YEAR OF HIS OWN MISSION.

DISSATISFIED with his expedition to Nazareth, Jesus went to Upper Galilee, which had already been the theatre of his wonders. He found the inhabitants of that country in a disposition better adapted to his purpose. He perceived, however, that the necessity they were under of suspending their labour in order to come and hear him, kept a great number at home. This consideration obliged him to disperse his apostles by two and two in the province. It is probable, he resolved on this dispersion because he found his own sermons and prodigies did not gain proselytes enough. The continual enterprises of his enemies made him feel the necessity of increasing his party.

It appears that Jesus had already sent several of his disciples on mission, retaining near himself his twelve apostles only; it may, however, be presumed that these preachers were as yet mere novices; their labours were unsuccessful; for they found the devils so obstinate as to resist their exorcisms. Yet this want of success was owing solely to the weakness of their faith, and would seem to throw a shade on the foresight and penetration of their divine master. Why did he send

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missionaries whose dispositions were not sufficiently known to him? Besides, it belonged to him alone to bestow on them before hand a necessary stock of faith for their journey.

Whatever opinion may be formed of this, there is reason for believing that the apostles, who never quitted their master, saw him continually operating, enjoyed his confidence, and had faith from the first hand—were better qualified than the disciples to labour to the satisfaction of the public. Thus Jesus, fully resolved to make a desperate effort, renewed all their powers, and gave them his instructions, of which the following is the substance: "Every thing being well considered, do not go among the Gentiles, for our Jews will charge it as a crime against us, and will employ it as a reproach against me. It is true I have already threatened to renounce them, but it is still necessary to make one attempt more; you will therefore preach to the Jews only. Repentance supposes sobriety and few wants; hence the inutility of riches. I have no money to give you, but strive to pick up for yourselves what you can. Providence will provide for you; if he takes care of the sparrows, he will take care of you. Moreover expect to be ill received, reviled, and persecuted; but be of good courage; all is for the best. Silence is no longer requisite; preach openly and on the house tops what I have spoken to you in secret. Inform the world that I am the Messiah, the son of David and the Son of God. We have no longer to observe discretion; we must either conquer or die; away then with pusillanimity.

"Though I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves, explain to the good people that you are under

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the safeguard of the Most High, who will take a terrible revenge for the outrages offered you, and liberally reward those who welcome you.*—You do not require to concert measures for supplying your expences; it belongs to those whose souls you are going to save to provide for the wants of your bodies; carry not therefore either gold, or silver, or provision, or two suits of raiment; take a good cudgel, and depart in the name of the Lord.

"Take care in your way always to preach that *the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* Speak of the end of the world: this will intimidate women and poltroons. On entering cities and villages, inform yourself underhand of such credulous people, as are very charitable and prepossessed in our favour. You will salute them civilly; saying, *Peace be to this house.* But the peace you bring must be only *allegorical;* for my doctrine is calculated to create trouble, discord, and division, every where. Whoever would follow me must abandon father, mother, kinsmen, and family; we want only fancies and enthusiasts, who, attaching themselves wholly to us, trample every human consideration under foot. *I came not to send peace, but a sword.* As a like conduct might embroil you with your hosts, you will

* It was evidently in strict compliance with this injunction that John Calvin, on the 30th of September 1561, wrote the following letter to the High Chamberlain of the King of Navarre:—"Honor, glory, and riches, shall be the reward of your pains; but above all, do not fail to rid the country of those zealous scoundrels, who stir up the people to revolt againt *us.* Such monsters should be exterminated, *as I have exterminated* Michael Servetus the Spaniard."—Vide *Eccles. Researches,* p. 348.

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change your abode from time to time. Do not rely on the power I have of raising the dead: the safest way for you is not to risk your being killed; shun therefore places where you shall find yourselves menaced with persecution. Leave disobedient cities and houses, *shaking the dust from off your feet.* Tell them, that they have incurred the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah. Declare, in my name, that the divine vengeance is ready to make them sensible of their guilt, and that the inhabitants of these cities will be less rigorously punished than those who shall have the audacity to resist your lessons. The great and last day is at hand: I assure you, that you shall not have finished your tour through all the cities of Israel before the Son of man shall arrive *."

Such is the sense and spirit of the instructions which Jesus gave to his apostles. In charging them to divulge his secret, he gave them a commission, which, notwithstanding his omnipotence, he himself dared not execute. But it was a grand policy to have instruments to act, without exposing himself personally in the matter.

These trifles, however, scarcely merit notice:—We are more surprised to find the Son of God proclaiming peace and charity, and at the same time asserting that he brings war and hatred. It is without doubt a God only who can reconcile these contradictions. It is besides unquestionable, that the apostles, and especially their successors in the sacred ministry, have in preaching their gospel brought on the world troubles and divisions unknown in all other preceding religions.

* St. Matt. x. St. Mark vi. St. Luke ix.

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The incredulous, who by the way refer to the history of the church, find, that the *glad tidings* which they came on purpose to announce, have plunged the human race into tears and blood*.

It is obvious from his language, that Jesus charged people of property with the maintenance of his apostles. Their successors have taken sufficient advantage of this, and through it assumed an authority to exercise for many ages the most cruel extortions on impoverished nations. Would not the Almighty have rendered his apostles more respectable by rendering them incapable of suffering, and exempting them from the wants of nature? There is reason to believe, that this would have given more weight to their sublime sermons and those of their infallible successors.

Critics maintain also that it was false to say near eighteen hundred years ago *the end of the world was near*,

* If the Christian religion be as is pretended, a restraint to the crimes of men;—if it produces salutary effects on some individuals—can these advantages, so rare, so inefficient and doubtful, be compared with the evident and immense evils which this religion has produced on the earth? Can the prevention of a few trifling crimes, some conversions useless to society, some sterile and tardy repentances, enter into the balance against the perpetual dissensions, bloody wars, horrid massacres, persecutions, and cruelties, of which the Christian religion has been a continual cause and pretext? For one secret sinful thought suppressed by it, there are even whole nations armed for reciprocal destruction; the hearts of millions of fanatics are inflamed; families and states are plunged into confusion; and the earth is bedewed with tears and blood. After this, let common sense decide the magnitude of the advantages which mankind derive from the *glad tidings* which Christians pretend to have received from their God.——*Christianity Unveiled.*

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and more false still to affirm that the great Judge would arrive before the apostles could have time to make the tour of the cities of Israel. It is true, theologists understand that the end of the world shall happen when all the Jewish cities, that is, when all the Jews shall be converted. Time will demonstrate whether it be in that sense we ought to understand the words of Jesus: meanwhile the world still remains, and does not appear to threaten speedy ruin.

It is likewise very probable, that, besides these public instructions, Jesus gave more particular ones to his apostles. They departed in the hope of charities which they were to receive from Jews, of whom the greatest number were already in a state of reprobation, or damned *in petto* by Providence. Jesus altered his orders in part; he reserved for himself the cities, and left the villages only to his apostles. Accordingly they went here and there, calling out, *Hearken to the glad tidings; the world is near its end. Repent therefore, pray, fast, and give us money and provisions, for having acquainted you with this interesting secret.* We are also assured, that they cured several diseases by the application of a certain *oil.* They had doubtless done more excellent things, but the *paraclete* (the comforter) was not yet come: maugre the instructions of the Son of God, the understandings of the apostles were not yet sufficiently brightened *; for we do not find that the missionaries, with their balsam and fine speeches, made many converts. The incredulous are still much surprised to find, in the instructions of Christ to his apostles, an explicit order to labour only for the con-

* St. Luke ix. 6. St. Matt. xi. St. Mark vi. 12.

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version of the Jews, and an express prohibition against preaching to the Gentiles. They maintain, that a righteous God could make no distinction of persons; that the common father of mankind must show an equal love to all his children*; that it cost no more to the

* What should we say of the father of a numerous offspring, who should waste all his fondness upon one child, and never admit the rest to his presence, and then punish them for having no knowledge of his person? Would not such a conduct denote caprice and cruelty? Would he not be guilty of an injustice that we have never heard of in the most depraved and unfeeling of our species? How could a father think of punishing a child for not doing his will, which he thought proper to conceal from him? We must, therefore, conclude that a particular revelation pre-supposes not a good and equitable God, but not an unjust and whimsical tyrant, who, if he be lavish of his favours to a few, is at least cruel and unjust to the rest. Revelation, in this case, does not prove the goodness, but the caprice, of a being, whom religion declares to be the perfection of wisdom, benevolence, and justice, and the common father of all the common race. If self-interest should carry a few to admire the hidden ways of the Almighty, what ought the many to think who are made the victims of his injustice and partiality? Assuredly pride alone could ever have induced a particular people to fancy themselves the privileged of their race, and the only favoured of heaven. Blinded by vanity, they perceived not the wrong they offered their Creator, in presuming that all his creatures, being equally the work of his hands, were not equally the objects of his care and affection. It is, nevertheless, upon particular revelations that all the religions in the world are founded. As every man has the vanity to think himself of more importance than his fellow, so has every nation conceited that they were the exclusive favourites of the author of nature. If the Indians believe that Brama spoke for their instruction alone, the Jews and the Christians are persuaded that the world was created for them, and that God has manifested himself for them only.——*Preservative against Religious Prejudices.*

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Almighty to convert and save all nations; that a God, who is friendly to one country only, is a God purely local, and cannot be the God of the universe; and that a God partial, exclusive, and unjust, who follows caprice alone in his choice, can neither be perfect nor the model of perfection. In short, those who have not the happiness of being *sacredly* blinded by faith, cannot comprehend how the equitable and wise Lord of all the nations of the earth could cherish exclusively the Jewish people; his infinite prescience ought to have shown him that his love and favours would be completely lost on this untractable people.

Unbelievers remark, that it does not become the Son of God to exclaim, "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." Would it not have been wiser to go and preach to cities so docile, where Christ was certain of success, than to persist in preaching to the Jews, as to whom he was certain of miscarrying?

Jesus, now left alone, went about preaching through many cities of Galilee; but deprived of the assistance of his dear confidents, he did not in these places work any wonders.

We have hitherto seen the magistrates and the great paying little attention to the conduct of Jesus; they despised a man whom they regarded as a vagrant, or a fool little to be feared. 'Tis true, that some of Herod's officers are said to have been on the watch, along with the Pharisees, to destroy him; but this combination had no success. After all, the new mis-

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sionary could give umbrage solely to the Jewish priests and the doctors of the law, against whom he declaimed with the greatest indecorum. By this conduct he rendered himself very agreeable to the people, long weary of the extortions of these public bloodsuckers, who, without pity, drained the nation, treated the poorer sort with disdain, and, as the parable of the priest and the Samaritan evinces, were destitute of charity. The priests and doctors were very numerous in Jerusalem; on which account the people in the capital, as we have seen, were less disposed than elsewhere to listen to our preacher, and there is reason to believe, that the priests were the true cause of the hatred and contempt entertained against him in this great city.

By a very singular contrariety, the most obscure interval in our hero's life was that wherein he acquired the greatest celebrity. Jesus was wholly unknown at the court of Herod; while at the head of his troop, and surrounded by multitudes, he chased away devils, gave sight to the blind and speech to the mute, expelled the sellers from the temple, and raised the dead. But while he led a private life in Galilee,—when, during the mission of his apostles, he found himself alone and without followers, and content with preaching repentance,—it was then that his fame, penetrating even to the throne, excited in the monarch a desire to see him. According to St. Luke, a ray of light struck the heart of Herod; doubt filled his mind; "John," said he, "have I caused to be beheaded, but he must have risen from the dead, and therefore it is that so many miracles are performed by him; but who should

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this be of whom I hear such great things?" Herod must see Jesus to explain these matters, and for this purpose he sent for him*.

If nature had given Christ unquestionable rights to the throne of Judea, we might believe that these pretensions were his motives for not putting himself in the power of a prince, the usurper of his crown. But Jesus could not dissemble that his pretensions were not too well established; he knew besides, that for a long time past the family of David had lost the sovereign power. We must therefore search for another motive for his refusing to see Herod; the more so, as the interview with the Son of God would not only have contributed to the conversion of this prince and all his court, but even of all Judea, and perhaps of the whole Roman empire. A single miracle of consequence, performed before a court, acknowledged and attested by persons of high authority, would doubtless have been more effectual than the suspected testimony of all the peasantry and vagabonds in Galilee. Far from complying with the requests of Herod, and performing so eminent a benefit, Jesus withdrew into a desert as soon as he learned the prince's intention†. He who often uttered the most terrible curses against such as rejected him, scorned the invitation of a sovereign, and fled into a desert, instead of labouring for his conversion. The Messiah, who made no difficulty in entering the house of a centurion to heal his slave, refused to visit a monarch in order to cure his blindness, and bring

* St. Luke, v. 7. &c. St. Mark, vi. 14, &c. St. Matt. xiv 1, &c.

† St. Matt. xiv. 13.

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back to himself all his subjects, for whom, he affirmed that he was specially sent!

Our theologians explain these contradictions by referring us to the inexplicable decrees of Providence. But the incredulous maintain, that Jesus, who well knew how to work wonders in the eyes of a simple populace, dared not to expose himself before an enlightened court; and it must be owned, that the manner in which he comported himself before his judges, before whom he was afterwards to appear, strengthens this opinion.

Meanwhile, the mission of the apostles expired.—In a short time they had traversed Galilee: and it appears from the repast which Jesus soon after gave to a crowd of people that the preaching of his missionaries had procured an abundant harvest. Loaded with the alms of the Galileans, the apostles returned to their master, who again found himself incommoded by the multitude which flocked to see him.—To enjoy more liberty, the party embarked on board a small vessel, which conveyed them across the sea of Galilee. There, in a retired spot, the apostles gave an account of the success of their mission—they made arrangements for the future, and especially secured their provisions in a place of safety.

Those who had seen Jesus embark, thought, perhaps, they were for ever to be deprived of the pleasure of seeing him perform wonders. They made the tour of the lake, and though on foot, reached the other side before Jesus arrived there in his vessel. He preached to them, wrought miracles and cured the diseased; and these labours lasted until the evening.—His disciples that devised him to send away the people from the

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desart place, that they might go in search of lodgings and victuals in the neighbouring villages. He made no reply on the article of lodging; — there were doubtless few persons in this multitude who were accustomed to sleep on down—besides, the nights were likely not cold in that season and climate. But wishing to amuse himself with the embarrassment of those who made the proposal, and who might not know the resources which the collections of his apostles had procured, "It is necessary," said he, "that they should go into the villages,—give them, yourselves, wherewith to eat." "Think you so?" replied they,—"shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat?"—Philip, who perhaps was not in the secret*, represented the impossibility of finding bread to feed this multitude: Upon which Christ said to Peter, "See how many loaves you have." He found none at all—a circumstance the more surprizing, as, according to St. Mark, they had withdrawn to this place "on purpose to eat.†" Peter, without answering the question, said to his master, "There is a young lad here, who has five barley loaves and two small fishes." Jesus ordered them to be brought, and made the multitude range themselves in companies of hundreds and of fifties.—From this arrangement it appeared that there were five thousand men, besides women and children. When every one had taken his place on the grass, Jesus, according to the usage of the Jews, blessed the loaves and fishes, broke, and dis-

* In important affairs, it was always Peter, James, and John, whom Jesus employed.

† St. Mark, vi. 31.

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tributed them among the apostles, who gave thereof to the people as much as they desired; they likewise filled twelve baskets with the fragments of this celebrated entertainment. The guests, penetrated with admiration, exclaimed, "This is of a truth a prophet, and that prophet who should come into the world*," which, translated into ordinary language, means, The true Amphitrion is he who gives us our dinner. The apostles spoke not a word.

Some critics, founding on the impossibilities this miracle presents, have ventured to doubt the truth of it: as if the *impossibility* of things could prejudice the reality of a miracle, the essence of which is to produce things impossible. Yet if attention is given to the account of the evangelists, who are not, however, very unanimous on particulars, we shall find, that this miracle presents nothing impossible, if we are inclined to give any credit to the prudence of the Son of God, who on this occasion, found that he could not make a better use of the provisions amassed by his apostles, than to distribute them to a hungry multitude. By this act, he saw himself certain of gaining their favour. It may be, the crowd was not quite so numerous as is related. Besides, our apostles, in passing to the opposite shore, might have thrown their nets with sufficient success to furnish fish for the company assembled. This meal must have appeared miraculous to persons who knew that Jesus had no fortune, and lived on alms. We accordingly find, that the people wanted to proclaim king the person who had so sumptuously regaled

* St. Mark, vi. 31—44. St. Matth. xiv. 18, &c, and St. John, vi.

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them. The entertainment no doubt recalled to their mind the idea of a Messiah, under whose government abundance was to reign. No more was requisite to induce a handful of miserables to believe, that the preacher, who by a miracle fed them so liberally, must be the extraordinary man the nation expected.

This great miracle then will become very probable, by supposing that the apostles in their collection had received a large quantity of bread. They amused themselves, as has been observed, with fishing while they crossed the lake; Jesus gave them the hint:—when evening was come, things were disposed without the observations of the people, who were thus fed with provisions amassed by means very natural.

Though the Galileans wished to proclaim Christ king, he did not think proper to accept an honour which he found himself for the present incapable of supporting. His exhausted provisions did not suffer him to undertake the frequent entertaining of so many guests at his own expence; and, though this conduct much more than all his other miracles, would have gained him the affections of the beggars, idlers, and vagabonds of the country, the necessity of his affairs prevented him from recurring to it.

Thus Jesus crowned the second year of his mission with an action well adapted to conciliate the love of the people, and at the same time give uneasiness to the magistrates. This stroke of eclat must doubtless have alarmed those in power, who perceived that the affair might become very serious, especially considering the intention the Galileans had displayed of proclaiming our adventurer king. The priests probably profited by these dispositions in order to destroy

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Christ, who at all times appeared anxious to gain the populace, on purpose to aid him afterwards in subduing the great. This project might have succeeded, if Judea, as in times past, had been still governed by kings of its own nation, who, as the Bible establishes, depended continually on the caprice of priests, of prophets, or of the first comer, who by predictions, declamations, and wonders, could, at will, stir up the Hebrew nation, and dispose of the crown: whereas in the time of Jesus, the Roman government had nothing to fear from the efforts of superstition.

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CHAPTER XIII.

JESUS REPASSES INTO GALILEE ABOUT THE TIME OF THE THIRD PASSOVER IN HIS MISSION.—WHAT HE DID UNTIL THE TIME HE LEFT IT.

THE expression of St. John*, who tells us, that *Jesus, knowing* the guests he had entertained *would come and take him by force on purpose to make him their king*, demonstrates that these guests had withdrawn at the end of the entertainment. This observation enables us to fix pretty correctly the route of Jesus, and affords a reason for his conduct.

It was already late when the disciples said to their master, that it was time to send away the people. The preparations for the repast must have consumed time: the distribution of the victuals required also some hours; so that daylight could not have been far off when the meal was finished, and when Jesus dismissed his guests. It was about the evening he learned the design they had of carrying him off to make him king; and it was not until after having received this intelligence, that he took the resolution of concealing himself in a mountain, after having dispatched his disciples to Capernaum. The latter to reach the place were obliged to make several tacks; when Jesus, observing this, changed his resolution, and set out for Gennesaret, on

* Chap. vi. ver. 15.

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the north side of the lake. Seeing him approach at the moment they thought him far off in the recesses of the mountain, his disciples were terrified; *they took him for a spirit*, for spirits were very common in Judea. They were confirmed in their opinion when they perceived his shadow near their vessel. Simon Peter observing him advance, did not doubt but he had seen him walking on the waters. In attempting to go and meet his master, he felt himself sinking; but Jesus took him by the hand, and saved him from the danger in which he believed himself to be; and, after reprimanding him for his cowardice, went with him on board the ship. The apostles, who had not been much struck with the miracle of the five loaves, were very much astonished at this. They had been in great fear, and fear disposes to believe; in their distress they confessed unanimously, *that he was truly the Son of God.*

Jesus reached Gennesaret at noon. There several of his guests recognized him, and did not neglect to announce his arrival to others. They presented him the diseased, and he performed a great number of cures. We cannot too much admire the faith of the Galileans, who exposed at all seasons their sick in the streets, and the complaisance of Jesus, who indefatigably cured them!

The guests at the miraculous supper two days before, whom their affairs called home, had returned; but the greatest number, that is, all the labouring people, having seen Jesus' ship take the direction of Capernaum, had set out by land for that city. Some vessels from Tiberias arrived there at the same time, but none carried Jesus, and nobody had seen him; for he had made his passage during night. The crowd how-

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ever tarried still, in hopes of being again entertained *gratis*, when they learned at Capernaum that Christ was on the opposite shore. Immediately all our idle folks set out, either by land or by water, on purpose to visit him*.

But these parasites, instead of finding a repast served out on the grass were entertained with a sermon. Jesus, who had not always wherewith to defray the expences of so numerous a court, held forth to them this language: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye seek me, not because you saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.—Labour," added he "for life everlasting.———" His hearers, whose ideas extended not beyond the present life, did not comprehend what Jesus meant; they therefore asked him what it was requisite they should do; on which he gave them to understand, that it was necessary they should become his disciples, as he was the Messiah. Here we are quite surprised to find them asking of Jesus, "What *sign shewest thou then that we may believe?* What extraordinary thing do you perform for that purpose?—You will perhaps instance the supper you gave us, but did not *our fathers eat manna in the desart for forty years?* and after all, what is your supper in comparison with that wonder?"

From this we may perceive, that Jesus strove in vain to draw over these Galileans to his party. The continuation of the miraculous repast was alone capable of moving them. Jesus to no purpose maintained, that the bread, with which Moses had fed their fathers, was not the bread of heaven, which alone could pro-

* St. John, vi. 22—31.

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perly nourish; *An empty belly has no ears;* so they suffered him to preach on.—After he had spoke a great deal. "Well," said they in their turn, "give us then this bread, which alone nourishes, for it signifies little to us what kind of bread we eat; but some we must have. Promise to furnish us with it at all times, and at this price we shall be at your devotion."

It appears, that if Jesus at this moment had possessed the same resources as formerly, he would have been able, at little expence, to form a small army, which the pleasure and assurance of having food without toil would have soon increased; but all failed. These people offered themselves to him, providing he would always furnish them with bread. The proposition was urgent, and Jesus got off with so bad a grace, that his disciples themselves were shocked at it. He said to them, "that he himself was bread, that his flesh was meat, and his blood wine; and that to get to heaven, it was necessary to eat this bread and meat, and drink this wine sent down from heaven: that those only who eat it would be raise up, and conduct to everlasting banquets*." Our dull folks comprehend

* The doctrine of the Eucharist is founded upon this and similar passages of the New Testament. Those, says Boulanger, who wander farthest from reason, and have entered most deeply into the spirit of the Christian religion, not contented with the dark mysteries common to other sects, have invented one still darker and more astonishing, which they denominate transubstantiation. At the all-powerful command of a priest, the God of the Universe is forced to descend from the habitation of his glory, and transform himself into a piece of bread. This bread is afterwards worshipped by a people who boast their detestation of idolatry! Absurd as this doctrine is, it is not peculiar to Christians,

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ed none of this mysterious jargon, contrived on purpose to puzzle them. Perceiving that they were not moved by it, he informed them, that in order to follow him, a particular *call* was necessary, and that as they were not disposed to do this, they were, therefore, not called*.

nor does it appear to have originated with Christ. In Indostan, the Bramas distribute a kind of grain in their Pagodas; this distribution is called *Prajadam* or Eucharist. The Mexicans believe in a kind of transubstantiation, which is mentioned by father Acosta in his Travels, chap. 24. The Protestants have had the courage to reject transubstantiation, though it is formally established by Christ, who says, "*Take, eat; this is my body.*" The Peruvians have a religious ceremony, in which, after sacrificing a lamb, they mingle his blood with flour, and distribute it amongst the people.---*Anetanae quest. lib. 2. cap. 20.*

* We cannot do too much in order to expose the absurd doctrines of grace and predestination held by Christians. An intelligent writer, whom we have already quoted, remarks---"We scarcely find any traits of the Supreme Being in the fundamentals of this religion, but what strongly impress us with notions subversive of his moral attributes. If we exclaim against a conduct so unworthy of a just and beneficent Being, religion will tell us that God is the disposer of his own gifts; that he owes us nothing: that we are but worms of the earth, who have no right to scrutinize his actions; and that to murmur or complain, is to incur his everlasting resentment. It is easy to discover the weakness of such reasoning. Power, I do contend, can never confer the right to violate justice. A sovereign who punishes and rewards, without any regard to merit and demerit, in both cases incurs the imputation of blame: his subjects may, indeed, flatter and fear him, but never can sincerely love and serve him. If he be deemed a fit subject of praise, it can only be by those who have had the good fortune to be selected as the objects of his kindness. If it be true, that in

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The adherents Jesus procured on this occasion were but few. The Jews, on the other hand, were indignant that he should pretend to have descended from heaven. We *know*, said they, *his father and mother*, and we *know where he was born.* All these rumours, spreading as far as Jerusalem, so irritated the priests, that they resolved on his death; but the Son of God eluded their pursuits and designs by skilful marches and countermarches, which disconcerted their vigilance. It was especially in the capital that they wished to ensnare him; but Jesus had not been there at the last passover. His distance from the metropolis did not prevent them from knowing his most secret proceedings; and from this he concluded there were some false brethren in the number of his disciples. He was not deceived: but the fear of being betrayed in a country where his resources began to fail, through his refusal to give the people bread, induced him to dissemble till he should arrive in a place of safety. He set out therefore on his journey homeward to Capernaum. At this place he recited nearly the same sermon he had in vain preached to the Galileans. No one, however, would consent to receive for food his flesh and blood. Those who enjoyed his con-

relation to God we are but as worms of the earth, or that in his hands we are as a vessel in the hands of a potter, then must it follow that there is no moral relation between the creature and his Creator. Seeing, therefore, that a worm of the earth owes to man who crushes him nothing, and that the vessel can have no obligation to the potter who forms it, and supposing that man is but a worm, or a brittle vessel in the estimation of his Maker, then must he be alike incapable to honour or offend him—hence I conclude that religion is useless."

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fidence, knew very well that he gave better cheer; but his other disciples asserted, that they could not subsist on this mysterious mess, and took their leave of him*. Unable to do better, Christ was obliged to suffer them to depart.

Jesus observing the defection of a part of his followers, was vexed at it; and in sorrow for the harm it would occasion, asked the twelve, "And will you also leave me? On which Simon Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe, and are sure, that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Thus Jesus was assured, in the best way he could, of the fidelity of his apostles;—yet we see, that in spite of his infinite knowledge, he always kept the traitor Judas in his company, though he must have foreseen that he would deliver him up to his enemies.

Meanwhile Christ departed on purpose to return into Galilee, whither his apostles followed him, though his last preaching, and particularly the refusal of victuals, had dissatisfied the Galileans. They did not indeed give him a very welcome reception. The arrival of some Pharisees and doctors from Jerusalem completely marred every thing. They were deputed by the chiefs in the capital to watch the conduct of Jesus, and to put the people on their guard against him. Every one knows, how strictly the Jews adhere to the ceremonies of their law; and in spite of his protestations of attachment to it, Jesus, like his trusty friends, observed none of its ordinances. It was particularly taken amiss that they ate without washing their hands. But he de-

* St. John, vi. 66, &c.

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fended himself with saying, that it was better to violate traditions and neglect ceremonies, than to infringe the commandments of God, as the doctors did. He advanced, contrary to express law, *that nothing which enters the body defiles it, and that it is what comes out of it that renders it impure.* This seems to establish, that Christ and his party were not scrupulous as to their aliments. Thereafter he launched out in invectives against the doctors, whom he called hypocrites, ignorant and blind, who conducted others that were also blind. In his anger he did not perceive that the compliment was not less offensive to the people than to their guides. On this account the latter preserved a deep resentment, but the populace did not regard it. Besides, Jesus did not allow them time for reflection; he engaged their attention by a fine discourse, to prove that the lawyers and priests were the worst of men, and the least charitable, and that none could be happy, either in this world or in the other, without becoming his disciples.

In the mean time he was informed that there was no safety for him in this place. He therefore left it in great haste, with an intent to go towards the frontiers of Tyre and Sidon. His design was to live concealed in a house of the country, whither he had withdrawn; but with such great renown as that of our hero, it was difficult to continue long unknown. The secret of his retreat was divulged; and, as misfortune sometimes turns to good, this trifling duplicity procured him the advantage of performing a miracle among the Gentiles. A woman of Canaan came, and besought him to deliver her daughter from a devil that tormented her. Jesus at first made no answer. She insisted—the

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apostles interceded, and pressed their master to grant her request, merely on purpose to silence her; for she spoke clamorously, and might have disclosed that he was the Messiah. He defended himself on the plea of his being sent to the Jews only, and not to the Heathen. —They again besought him, and answered his comparison by another.—He at length yielded; and the girl was delivered from her devil or her vapours.*

The success of Jesus in this country terminated with this miracle. He passed from thence into Decapolis; and there acquired some consequence from the cure of a dumb and deaf man, on pronouncing the word *Ephata*, and then putting his finger into his ears and spittle on his tongue. It would, therefore, appear that our missionary made a sufficiently abundant harvest of alms. He moreover wrought a great number of miracles on the sick, the cripple and the maimed. But it was his custom to steal away when his miraculous power began to make a noise; he accordingly withdrew to a mountain at the distance of three days journey from the place where he had performed so many miracles†. The people in a crowd followed him in his retreat, and it appears that they did so without eating. But at this time, Christ loaded with provisions or money procured by his miracles, again saw himself in a situation to lay the table-cloth. As if he knew nothing of this, he asked one of his apostles how many loaves they had: Seven was the answer. He then ordered the multitude to sit down on the ground; and taking the loaves, blessed them, together with some small fishes.—These were distributed to four thousand

* St. Matt. xv. St. Luke, vii. St. John, vii.
† St. Mark, xv. St. Mark, vii.

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men, besides women and children, who were all satisfied; and with the remains of the repast, they afterwards filled seven baskets. This prodigy appears to be a mere repetition of what we have related before; yet St. Chrysostom maintains, that the difference of the number of baskets proves irrefragably they must not be confounded.

Admitting this, it would appear, that Jesus, having no longer any safe retreat in his own country, sacrificed once more the money and provisions his prodigies had enabled him to amass. It was necessary to gain the people, and he at that time felt he had very great need of them; he was generous when he had the means to be so, and he had not forgot that they had promised to follow him, provided he would give them food.

The evangelists, however, overheated with the idea of this miracle, forgot another equally deserving their notice.—It was indeed a prodigy to see four thousand men, without reckoning women and little children, following Jesus during three days without eating or drinking; or else we must believe, that, prepared to travel, these people had provided themselves with provisions, which suddenly failed. But, in a desart, whence came the baskets they made use of in gathering up the remains of the entertainment? It is to be presumed, that they dropt down from heaven. But, on the other hand, why not make loaves and fishes drop down also? It was undoubtedly still requisite, by a new miracle, to feed this multitude during the three days' march necessary for their return. Yet, throughout the whole business, it would have been a shorter way to have made the people feel neither hunger nor thirst. It would have been a shorter way, by an effort of effectual mercy, to have converted, at once, all

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the inhabitants of Judea, and spared Jesus the trouble of so many entertainments, flights, marches, and countermarches, which at last terminated in a manner so tragical to this hero of the romance.

The Pharisees and Sadducees did not lose sight of Jesus; and on learning that he had returned to the interior of the kingdom, they went in search of him. The evangelists, it is suspected, made them much worse than they were in reality, by representing them as eager to ruin them. Was it then so difficult to arrest thirteen men? Be that as it may, these Pharisees at this time accosted Jesus very politely, and demanded of him a miracle. "You perform them," said they, "by dozens, in presence of a thousand people, who, by your own confession, do not believe in you; give us then a specimen of your skill, and we shall be less opiniative than those of whom you complain. Do then shew us this condescension." Jesus was inexorable, and perpetually referred them to Jonas. This refusal offended them: he, in turn, inveighed against them; and as the presence of these inconvenient spectators rendered his power useless, he quitted them in order to go to Bethsaida.

On the way his apostles asked him the reason of his refusal to work a miracle in presence of persons who entreated him in so handsome a manner; on which Jesus, by a figure gave them to understand, that he could not operate before people so clear-sighted; *Beware*, said he, *of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod.* Our silly folks, who had not time to provide bread, thought their master meant to reprove them for their negligence. Any other but Jesus would have laughed at the mistake, but the state of

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his affairs chagrined him, and he treated them very harshly.*

On his entering Bethsaida, they brought him a blind man whom he cured by applying spital to his eyes. This remedy at first produced a pleasant effect: the man saw other men, like trees, walking; Jesus then laid his hands on him, and immediately he saw quite otherwise.†

But this miracle gained no conquest to the Messiah. He, therefore, went to try his fortune in the villages in the environs of Cæsarea-Philippi. It is in this journey, that asking his apostles what they thought of him, some said that he passed for Elias, others for Jeremiah, &c.; but Peter openly confessed that he acknowledged him for the Christ:‡ a confession which has since gained him the honour of supremacy in the sacred college, and of being declared the head of the church.

Though sovereign in heaven, Christ possessed nothing on earth, and of course could confer no temporal gifts. Instead of these, he gave his disciples the spiritual privilege of damning and saving the rest of mankind at their pleasure.—He promised to Peter the place of *door-keeper of Paradise*, since become so lucrative an office to his successors and assigns. Meanwhile Jesus recommended silence to the party on this promotion; but perhaps the traitor Judas, not satisfied with the office of treasurer, did not preserve the secret.

Notwithstanding the suffrage of Peter, the consequences which might result from the choler of the

* St. Matt. xvi. St. Mark, viii. St. Luke, xii.
† St. Mark viii. 22—26.
‡ St. Matt. xvii. St. Mark, vii. St. Luke, ix.

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priests were always present to the mind of Jesus. He saw himself cried down, and rejected on all sides, and presumed with good sense, that being once excluded from all the provinces, and the Gentiles not much inclined to receive a Jew, expelled his own country, for legislator, he would be constrained, sooner or later, to return to Jerusalem, where he must expect to meet with perilous adventures. On the other hand, the Romans, masters of the forces over whom the Jews could arrogate no authority, would very quickly have put an end to the mission of a man whom they must have regarded either as a fool or as a disturber of the public peace, if he should have dared to declare against them. There is reason, indeed, to believe that the mission of Jesus existed in Judea merely because the Romans were not much displeased that a restless and turbulent people should amuse themselves with following a man of his rank, a pretended Messiah, to whose appearance the prepossessions of the nation gave rise. Always certain of being able to crush those who dared to undertake the boldest enterprises, they troubled themselves little about what might be done in the country by a party no way formidable to an authority seconded by disciplined legions.

The situation of the Son of God must have alarmed the companions of his fortune, however dull we may suppose them to have been; it was therefore necessary to contrive means to encourage those at least who were the honest dupes of his vain promises. He did not dissemble the bad state of his affairs, the fate he had to dread, and the death with which he was menaced. He anticipated them on this subject, and declared that even if he should suffer death, they must not be dis-

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couraged, for at the end of three days he would rise triumphant from the tomb.—We shall afterwards see the use the apostles made of this prediction which must at the time have appeared to them as foolish as incredible.

To retain them as his followers, and revive their zeal, Christ entertained them incessantly with the beauty of his Father's kingdom; but he forwarned them, that to arrive there, they must have courage, love him sincerely, and agree to suffer with him. These melancholy sermons demonstrated the situation of the orator, and tended rather to depress than incite the courage of his auditory. He, therefore, thought it seasonable to present to his disciples a specimen of the glory of which he had so often vaunted. For this purpose he exhibited the brilliant spectacle of the *transfiguration.** All the Apostles were not witnesses of it; he granted this favour to three only, Peter, James, and John, his most intimate confidents, to whom he recommended silence. This scene took place, it is said, on mount Thabor. There Jesus appeared irradiated with glory, accompanied with two others, whom the apostles took for Moses and Elias, and whom, as far as we can discover, they had never seen before.* A cloud unexpectedly enveloped the three luminous bodies; and when they no longer beheld any person, a voice was heard pronouncing these words, *This is my beloved Son.* The

* Theophylact assures us, that "in the *transfiguration* the apostles recognized Moses and Elias, not by their visage, which they had never seen, but by their talk." We suspect, however, that the apostles were as well acquainted with the *countenances* of Moses and Elias as with their *speech.*

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disciples were asleep while the spectacle was displayed —a circumstance which has occasioned a suspicion, that the whole was only a dream.

The apostles, who remained at the foot of the mountain, and had been deprived of this spectacle, wished to try their spiritual powers on a lunatic, or one possessed; but the devil disregarded their exorcisms. The father of the disordered person, perceiving their master descending from the mountain, immediately presented his son to him, whom Jesus cured; he then gave a strong reprimand to those *fumblers*; told them that their want of success was owing to want of faith, a grain of which was sufficient to remove mountains; he therefore recommended to them fasting and prayer, as the surest receipt for expelling certain demons, more rebellious than others*.

The people, however, withstood all these wonders: the devils, with whom *they* were possessed, could not be expelled by any means which Christ had yet contrived. Expecting, therefore, to draw over some of the strangers, whom the solemnities brought always in great numbers to the capital, he resolved, on account of the feast of Tabernacles, secretly to repair thither. Agitated, however, by the most troublesome misgivings, he traversed Galilee; he explained himself on his fears in an enigmatical and concealed manner to his apostles, who could not comprehend what he said; but who, on observing their master grieved, conformed themselves to his humour.

On arriving at Capernaum, the place of his usual residence, the officers charged with collecting the cus-

* St. Matt. xvi. St. Mark, ix. St. Luke, ix. 17.

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toms, took him for a stranger, and did not even recognise Matthew their old companion; they accordingly exacted the custom or tribute. Jesus being a Jew was offended at their demand; but whether they did not hearken to his reasons, or that he did not wish to be known, he dispatched Peter in search of a piece of thirty-pence in the mouth of a fish; or rather desired him go and catch a fish, which being sold for that sum, served to pay the custom.

The apostles, having understood from the Saviour's discourses, that his kingdom was still very distant, amused themselves with disputing on the pre-eminence and ranks they should enjoy in the empire which had been obscurely announced to them. In this they have been since faithfully imitated by their successors*. In

* The disputes between Christian priests have always been scenes of animosity, hatred, and heresy. We find these to have existed since the infancy of the church. A religion founded on wonders, fables, and obscure oracles could only be a fruitful source of quarrels. Priests attended to ridiculous doctrines, instead of useful knowledge; and when they should have studied true morality, and taught mankind their real duties, they only strove to gain adherents. They busied themselves in useless speculations on a barbarous and enigmatical science, which, under the pompous title of the science of God, or theology, excited in the vulgar a reverential awe. They invented a bigoted, presumptuous, and absurd system, as incomprehensible as the god whom they affected to worship. Hence arose disputes on disputes concerning puerile subtilties, odious questions, and arbitrary opinions, which, far from being useful, only tended to poison the peace of society. In these contentions we regret to find the most profound geniuses occupied, and are forced to censure the prostitution of talents worthy a better cause. The people, ever fond of turbulence entered into quarrels they could not

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the mean time Jesus took occasion from this dispute to deliver a sermon on humility. He called for a child, placed it in the midst of them, and declared, that this child was the greatest among them. This sermon, by which our clergy have profited so well, contains fine parables, and points out excellent means whereby to attain heaven, but not to thrive on earth. As all these, however, are only repetitions of what is taught in the sermon on the mount, we refer the reader to it.

Jesus wrought no miracles during his abode at Capernaum, where he had an interest not to be too much spoken of. His brethren or his parents, who it seems were of the same mind as the priests, repaired to that place on purpose to persuade him to leave his asylum and go into Judea, where he might exhibit his skill. They reminded him that the feast should draw him to Jerusalem, where he could not fail to find an opportunity of signalising himself.*

This ironical tone enabled Jesus to foresee that they were plotting against him. Here eternal truth extri-

understand. Princes undertook the defence of those priests they wished to favour, and orthodoxy was decided by the longest sword. This assistance the church never hesitated to receive in times of danger; for on such occasions the clergy rely rather on human assistance than on the promise of God, who declared that the sceptre of the wicked should not rest upon the lot of the righteous. The heroes found in the annals of the church, have been obstinate fanatics, factious rebels, or furious persecutors; they were monsters of madness, sedition, and cruelty. The world, in the days of our ancestors, was depopulated in the defence of extravagancies which excites laughter in a posterity, not indeed much wiser than they were.—*Christianity Unveiled.*

* St. John, vii.

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cated itself from these importunities by means of falsehood. The Son of God told his brethren to go to the feast, but assured them that for himself he would not go,* This, however, did not hinder him from taking the road to Jerusalem, but with the greatest secresy. In his way he cured ten lepers, among whom one only, who was a Samaritan, shewed any gratitude to his physician; and from courtesy to his faith his sins were remitted.† Notwithstanding this miracle and absolution, the incredulous do not find, that Christ can be acquitted of having prevaricated. It seems very strange that the Son of God, to whom his omnipotence furnished so many honourable means of acting openly, had recourse to subtilty and deception in order to elude the snares of his enemies. This conduct can be explained only by admitting, that what seems falsehood to carnal eyes is truth in the gospel.

* St. John, vii. 8. † St. Luke, xvii. 11, &c.

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CHAPTER XIV.

JESUS SHEWS HIMSELF AT JERUSALEM.—HE IS FORCED TO LEAVE IT.—RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS.—TRIUMPHANT ENTRY OF CHRIST.—HIS RETREAT TO THE GARDEN OF OLIVES.—THE LORD'S SUPPER.—HE IS ARRESTED.

IT is probable that our hero changed his intention of showing himself publicly at Jerusalem on learning the diversity of opinions which divided the capital on his account*. He imagined that his presence and discourses would remedy the inconstancy of the people, and remove the perplexity of disputants; but he deceived himself. He who so often recommended the *cunning of serpents*, failed on this occasion. But how revoke an immutable decree? The world had been created solely on purpose that man might sin, and man had sinned in order that Christ by his death might have the glory of making atonement for the sinner.

If they spoke much evil of Jesus in Jerusalem, they spoke also much good. Praise is a snare, wherein the Son of God himself was caught. Flattering himself with being able to reconcile the suffrages, he went to the temple and preached. But what must have been

* St. John, vii. 11, &c.

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his surprise, when on beginning to speak he heard the cries of rage, and the multitude accusing him of being possessed with a devil. In spite of the confused noise that reigned among the audience, Jesus continued to harangue. Perhaps, indeed, he might have succeeded in conquering the bad disposition of the assembly, if a company of archers had not arrived, and interrupted him precisely in the warmest part of his sermon. He was speaking of his heavenly Father, and this occurrence has, undoubtedly, made us lose a sublime treatise on the nature of the Divinity*. These archers, how-

* This circumstance, however, need scarcely be regretted, for the ancient fathers have furnished us with many *sublime* and *edifying* works on this subject. Tertullian has positively said, that God is *a body*. In the council of Elvira it is forbidden to light wax candles in church-yards, for fear of *scaring the souls of the saints*. In the fourth century *spirituality* was not yet decreed: there was a great dispute between the monks of Egypt about God, in order to ascertain whether he was corporeal or incorporeal. M. de Beausobre, in his *Hist. de Manicheisme*, tome 1. p. 207, shews, that among the first Christian doctors, each formed ideas of God and the soul conformable to the philosophic sect in which he had been educated. A Platonist made God incorporeal; a Pythagorean made him *an intelligent fire*, a light endowed with intelligence; an Epicurean made him a *material* being, an *animal* immortal and very happy. Many doctors revered by the church would now-a-days endanger themselves were they not quickly to retract their errors. Moses himself would be burned by the inquisition for being both a Jew and a materialist. Even few Christians have written on the existence of God, without drawing on themselves an accusation of atheism. Descartes, Clarke, Pascal, Arnauld, and Nicole, have been considered as Atheists. The reason is plain: — It is impossible to prove the existence of a Being so inconsistent as the God of the Christians. We shall be told

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ever, had no design to seize him: they wished only to impose silence on him; it was therefore easy for him to steal away.

Jesus, whose temper appears to have been vindictive and restless, was piqued at the insult, and continued his invectives against the priests, doctors, and principal men among the Jews, who taking counsel on the subject, they agreed to fulminate a decree against him, and try him for contumacy; but Nicodemus, whom we mentioned before, undertook his defence, and proposed to his brethren to go and hear him before condemning him. They, however, insisted that no *good ever came out of Nazareth*, i. e. that his protegé could be only a vagabond.

In his retreat on the mount of Olives, Jesus learned that they had delayed his trial. He therefore appeared next day in the temple by day-break. The doctors and senators came a little later, and brought him a female accused of adultery—a crime for which, according to the law, she ought to suffer death. The doctors, perhaps acquainted with her conduct, and informed of Christ's drawing after him women of wicked lives, wanted to ensnare him. He might have got off by merely saying, that it was not for him to judge; but he wished to argue. He wrote on the ground; and concluded very prudently, that for one to judge it is

that men have no means of judging of the Divinity, and that our understandings are too narrow to form any idea of him. Why then do they dispute incessantly concerning him? Why assign to him qualities which destroy each other? Why recount fables of him? Why quarrel, and cut each others' throats because these fables are differently interpreted by different persons and by different nations?

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necessary to be himself exempted from all sin. Then addressing himself to the doctors, " let him among you who is without sin, cast the first stone at her." At these words they departed, shrugging their shoulders. Jesus remained alone with the adultress, whom the Jews would not have treated so tenderly if she had been really culpable: on this he said to her, " Since no man hath accused thee, neither will I condemn thee: Go then, and sin no more."

Having happily escaped from this danger, Jesus thought himself in safety; but, induced by his natural petulance, he again hazarded a sermon in the temple; he spoke only of himself; and what follows was nearly his strongest argument. " You ask," said he, " a full proof by two witnesses. Now I bear witness of my Father, and my Father bears witness of me; you therefore ought to believe in me:" which amounts to this—*my Father proves me, and I prove my Father.* The doctors were but little surprised with this circuitous and erroneous reasoning, and with a view to come directly to the point, " Who art thou?" " I am," replied Jesus, " from the beginning, and I have many things to say to you; but I speak to the world those things only which I have heard of my Father." The audience were no doubt impatient at these ambiguous answers. Jesus, who wanted to augment their embarrassment, then added, that they would know him much better after they had put him to death.

The Messiah did not omit to display great views in this conference; he informed his hearers in dark language, that it would not perhaps be impossible to shake off the Roman yoke. But either through fear of chastisement, or that they did not believe such a

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man in a condition to effect so great a revolution, they affected not to comprehend him. Piqued at finding the doctors and Pharisees so dull and opiniative, he called them *children of the devil;* he affirmed that he was *older than Abraham.* In short, he broke out in a manner so unreasonable that the people, declaring against him, were about to stone him. Jesus, perceiving his folly when too late, concealed himself at first, and thereafter seized an opportunity to escape.

From this time his miracles became more rare, and the zeal of the people subsided. It was therefore necessary to rekindle it: Jesus accordingly performed a miracle by curing a man born blind, with a little earth moistened with spittle. This man was a well known mendicant, whom they could not suspect of any artifice. Yet they would no longer tolerate him after he had received his sight; an incident which no doubt diminished the alms he was in use to receive; but perhaps he was made a disciple; and indeed some legends assert that, after the death of Jesus, he came into Gaul, where he became a bishop or inspector, which at least presupposes good organs of vision.

Be that as it may, the prodigy made a noise and came to the knowledge of the Pharisees. The beggar underwent an examination; he openly confessed that one called Jesus had cured him with a clay of his composition and some bathings in Siloam. It must, however, be acknowledged that the bad humour of the Pharisees went a little too far on this occasion. They made it a crime for the physician to have composed his ointment on the Sabbath, and formed the project of excommunicating whoever should countenance our physician.

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This resolution made Jesus tremble. He knew the power of excommunication among the Jews; he found himself crossed in all his designs; and dared not venture to preach in Jerusalem, or shew himself in any other place; every thing, even his miracles, turned against him. It was not even without some difficulty that he had escaped from the capital. At a little distance he knew of an asylum and society in Bethany, where his friend Lazarus possessed a house. He accordingly took the resolution of retiring thither; but though it was a large house, the party that accompanied him might have incommoded their host. This determined Jesus to send seventy of his disciples on a mission to Judea, to whom it appears he now gave very ample powers; for on their return we find them applauding themselves, and overjoyed, at the facility with which they expelled the devils.

Scarcely had Christ arrived at Bethany, when, in order to receive him in a becoming manner, they prepared a banquet. But the voluptuous Magdalane, content to devour with her eyes her dear Saviour*, left

* Jesus, it is said by some writers, was *very beautiful*, which very naturally accounts for the Magdalane's attachment to him. We have a small tract, in Latin, on *the beauty of Christ*, composed by a Minime named Pijaret, and printed under the title of *De singulari Iesu Christi D. N. Salvatoris pulchritudine*, in 12mo. Paris, 1651. In the supposititious letter of Lentulus addressed to the Roman senate, will be found an exact description of the person of Jesus. *Codex Apocryph. N. T. tome* 1, p. 301.—Others, however, have maintained, that Jesus, to shew his humility, assumed a *very ugly* visage. It would really be gratifying, if some clergyman or layman of the present day would point out one particular as to the life, character, or person of the Messiah, in which all or even only two of his historians agree.

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Martha her sister, to superintend the arrangements in the kitchen, while she herself continued at his feet. Peevishness, and perhaps jealousy, got the better of Martha; she came and scolded Magdalene, but the tender Messiah undertook the defence of his penitent, and asserted that she had chosen the better part; brother Lazarus, who came in unexpectedly, terminated the squabble by ordering them to their work*.

This little altercation, however, was the cause why Jesus did not tarry long at Bethany.—When about leaving it, a Pharisee, through pure curiosity, invited him to dinner. The Messiah accepted his invitation; but our unpolished Jew had not the civility to give his guest water to wash with. This occasioned him a fine lecture on charity, filled with marvellous comparisons, which, however, we shall pass over in silence, as our orator so frequently conned over the same lesson, and as this dinner appears to be a repetition of one we have already mentioned.

From this period, till the feast of the dedication of the temple, our hero wandered in the environs of Jerusalem, along with his disciples, whom he incessantly entertained with the grandeur of his ærial kingdom, and what it was necessary to do in order to enter it. It was, according to St. Luke, on this occasion, and according to St. Matthew, in the sermon on the mount, that he taught the apostles, who could not read, a short prayer, called, since that time, the Lord's prayer, which (injurious as it is to the Divinity, whom it seems to accuse *of leading us into temptation)*, Christians still continue to repeat.

* St. Luke, x. and xi.

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Meanwhile time run on without any advantage. The cessation of prodigies and preaching occasioned that of alms. Jesus again hazarded a sermon in a village; but although it attracted the admiration of the people, who asked nothing better than to admire, it produced no effect. Towards the end of Christ's mission we no longer see the crowd running after him.—If he wished to perform a miracle, he was under the necessity of calling those he wished to cure. For eighteen years an old woman of this village had been quite bent; it was, according to the language of the country, the devil, who had kept her in this inconvenient posture. Jesus called her and exclaimed: "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity*." The old woman made efforts to become straight; she approached the feet of the Messiah with the pace of a tortoise; he laid his hand on her, and immediately she walked upright like a wench of fifteen. At this time the devil spoke not a word on his departure; on which it has been remarked that Satan followed always the opinion of the spectators of the Saviour's miracles, and marvellously coincided with them in acknowledging or rejecting Christ. This analogous conduct of the spectators and Satan, was, perhaps, the result of the excommunication fulminated against all who regarded Jesus as the Messiah.

The reputation of John Baptist subsisted still on the banks of the Jordan. To excite the primitive zeal, or perhaps with an intent to induce the disciples of John, who had borne him such flattering testimony, to follow him, Jesus turned towards that quarter; but the attempt was fruitless. He succeeded no better in curing

* St. Luke, xiii. 11.

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a dropsical person that chanced to be in the house of a Pharisee who gave the Saviour a dinner. His cures were admired, but he spoiled all by his extravagant arguments, so offensive were they to the greatest part of his hearers. As a last resource he essayed to attach to himself publicans, officers, and such like disreputable persons; but these were only feeble props, and their familiarity made him lose the little esteem which others still entertained for him.*

The sight of punishment has often occasioned the loss of courage even to the most determined hero. Ours, agitated by a crowd of untoward events, imagined that nothing being dearer to men than life, and nothing more difficult than to come back after leaving it, the people of Jerusalem notwithstanding the clamours of the priests would not fail to declare in his favour if he could succeed in making them believe that he had the power of raising the dead. Lazarus the intimate friend of Jesus, appeared to him the fittest person in the world for presenting to the public the spectacle of a dead man brought again to life. When every thing was properly concerted and disposed, Christ set out for Bethany. Learning this, Martha and Magdalane sent to meet him, and publicly informed him that their brother was very sick. Jesus made them no answer, but speaking aloud so as to be heard, "This sickness," said he, "is not unto death, but for the glory of God."—This was already telling too much.

Instead of going to Bethany or any where else, Christ remained two days in a village without doing any

* St. Mark, x. St. Luke xiii. 17.

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thing; thereafter he told his apostles that it was necessary to return into Judea. He was already there at the time he spoke, but he meant no doubt to speak of the capital. They represented that it would be a very imprudent journey, as a short time before the populace wanted to stone him. We see that Jesus said this on purpose to give room to his friends to invite him not to neglect brother Lazarus in his sickness. Besides the following words evince that he had no intention of going to Jerusalem. Our friend *Lazarus sleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep.* —On hearing this the apostles thought he had recovered. Jesus declared to them that *he was dead*, and that he was highly pleased with his not having been present at Lazarus's decease, as it would afford means to confirm them in the faith.

The two days which Jesus passed in the village, joined to the long space of time he took in going about half a league, were immediately converted into *four days* from the time he pretended Lazarus was dead. At last he arrived at the abode of the defunct, whom they had deposited in a vault adjoining to his house, and not according to the custom of those days, in a sepulchre out of the city. After some questions put to Martha on her belief, he assured her, that her brother would rise again. *Yes*, said she, *but it will be at the last day.* Here our Thaumaturge affected to be very sensibly touched; he trembled, he wept*, in-

* At Vendome, in the monastery of the Holy Trinity, is preserved *the sacred tear* which Jesus shed while lamenting his friend Lazarus. M. de Thiers, a Frenchman, having had the resolution to write against the authenticity of this relic, got into a dangerous scrape with the Benedictines.

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voked the aid of heaven, caused himself to be brought to the vault, made it be opened, called on Lazarus with a loud voice, and commanded him to come forth. The dead man, though tied and wrapped up in his grave clothes, arose and was unloosed before witnesses at the entrance of the vault.

It must be acknowledged, that this prodigy was conducted with very little dexterity. St. John, the only Evangelist who relates this striking miracle, in vain props his relation with the presence of the Jews: he destroys his own work by not making them come till after the death of Lazarus to console his sisters. It was necessary that the Jews should have seen him die, dead, and embalmed; that they should have felt the smell of his corruption; and that they should have conversed with him after his coming out of the tomb*. Unbelievers, who have treated on miracles, have exhausted all the darts of criticism on this one. To investigate it would be only repeating what they have said. The Jews found in it such strong marks of knavery, that far from being converted they took more serious measures against Jesus, who having intimation thereof withdrew towards the desart to a city called *Ephrem*, where he abode with his disciples. In the mean time the cities and villages were enjoined to refuse him an asylum, and the inhabitants to deliver him up to the magistrates. In fact, this miracle occasioned a general proscription of the Messiah. On presenting himself at the gates of a town in Samaria, they at first refused to let him pass; he was not permitted to stop at Jericho, though he there gave sight to a blind man†. He

* St. John, xi.

† St. Matthew says, (xx. 29, &c.) that Jesus gave sight to *two* blind men.

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therefore returned to Bethany, where he was received, not by Lazarus who had perhaps been obliged to save himself on account of his being concerned in such an imposture, but, as St. Matthew affirms, by Simon the leper. Lazarus after his resurrection appeared no longer on the stage*.

This rejection and desertion of Christ threw the apostles into consternation. To re-animate their confidence, Jesus caused a fig-tree to die in twenty-four hours to punish it for not producing figs at a season when it was physically impossible for it to carry any, that is about the month of March†.—As all the actions of the Messiah, even when they appear foolish to ordinary men, have an important signification in the eyes of devotees illuminated by faith, we ought to perceive in the miracle of this fig-tree one of the fundamental dogmas of the Christian religion symbolically represented. In this point of view, the fig-tree cursed is the mass of mankind, whom, according to our theologists, the God of mercy curses, and condemns to eternal flames, for having neither had faith nor grace which they could not possibly acquire of themselves, and which God does not seem to have been willing to give them. Thus we shall find that the ridiculous passage of the fig-tree in the gospel, is intended to typify one of the most profound dogmas of the Christian religion‡.

* A legend, according to Baronius, affirms that Lazarus went afterwards to preach the faith to the Provençals, and was the first bishop of Marseilles. As for Magdalane, she went to bewail her sins and the death of her lover in a desart of Provence, called *la Sainte Baume* (the Holy Balm.) Martha, as every body knows, lies interred at Tarascon.

† St. Mark, xi. 20.

‡ For maintaining the dogma, that this as well as other pretended miracles of Christ were merely allegorical, the vir-

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Whilst Jesus in this manner instructed his apostles by figures and ingenious parables, they were labouring hard against him at Jerusalem. It appears, that the Sanhedrim was divided on his account. They perhaps wished much to punish him, but not to put him to death. All were of opinion that he should be arrested without noise, and that they should consider afterwards on the punishment to be inflicted on him. The most fiery of the priests wished that he should be seized in the capital, and assassinated during the hurry of the festival This establishes that they did not consider themselves certain the people would not interest themselves in his behalf. Perhaps they had great reason: —What a part of the populace did in his favour when he approached Jerusalem, evinced that it would have been very dangerous to act openly. In pursuance of this plan, they secretly promise a reward to whoever should deliver up Jesus, and we shall soon find one of his apostles betray his master for a very trifling sum.

There is sufficient reason to believe that before entering Jerusalem, Jesus caused his approach to be announced by his friends in that city. His adherents la-

tuous Woolstan so far excited the indignation of the clergy, that they persecuted him even unto death. Having been a prisoner in the King's Bench for eight years, as a punishment for publishing his "Discourses on the Miracles;" the most powerful interest used for his release proved unavailing, when opposed to the rancour of the priesthood; till at last he became a martyr to the cause of truth, leaving behind him a character which for strict probity and benevolence cannot be surpassed, if even equalled, in the whole Christian church. Yet we find that the opinions avowed by Woolstan were those which were strenuously held by the most celebrated and orthodox of the ancient fathers.

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boured to render his entry into the capital somewhat brilliant. As for himself, affecting to display modesty in the midst of his triumph, or unable to do better, Christ chose for his steed a young ass that had never been rode on, which his disciples, by his order, had seized with its mother. In place of a saddle, some of the disciples laid their clothes on the back of the ass*. The company advanced in good order.—The people, ever fond of a spectacle, ran to see this; and we may believe that if some at this time paid sincere homage

* At Verona are the remains of this ass, preserved in the belly of an artificial ass. It was the will of Jesus that the beast he used, should pass the rest of his days in quiet and liberty. Weary with having so long gnawed on the pastures of Palestine, the ass resolved to visit foreign countries, and to undertake a voyage by sea; he had no need of a ship; the waves became smooth, and the liquid element as hard as crystal. After he had visited the islands of Cyprus, Rhodes, Candia, Malta, and Sicily, he passed over the Gulph of Venice, and staid some days in the place where that famous city has since been built: but feeling the air to be unhealthful, and the pasturage bad, among the salt and marshy isles, Martin continued his voyage, mounted the river Adige dry shod, and coming up to Verona, he made choice of that city for his last residence. After he had lived there some years, like an ass of estate and quality, he died to the great grief of the confraternity. So lamentable and universal a braying made the echoes resound through the country, and never was so sad a melody heard at the funeral of such an animal even in Arcadia itself! But they quickly found a way to alleviate their grief; for all the honours imaginable being rendered to the blessed deceased, the devotees of Verona carefully preserved the reliques, and put them into the belly of an artificial ass made for that purpose, where they are kept to this day, to the great joy and edification of pious souls!—*Misson and Keysler's Travels.*

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to the triumpher, the greatest number laughed at him and shouted at the ridiculous farce*.

The chief magistrate, fearing an uproar, endeavoured to quiet the populace, to whom the disciples had set the example. He accordingly addressed Jesus himself, who answered that "the stones would speak rather than his friends should be silent."—This seemed to insinuate an insurrection in case they should attempt to employ authority; and the magistrate understood very well that this was not the moment to provoke Jesus.

As soon as Christ had entered Jerusalem, he betook himself to weeping and predicting its ruin. The announcing of calamities was, and will ever be, a sure method to excite the attention of the vulgar. Some persons of consequence who knew not the cause of the riotous assemblies of the people around Jesus, on enquiry were answered, It is Jesus of Nazareth—it is a prophet of Galilee. St. Mark assures us that in this transaction, decisive in behalf of the Son of God, Jesus once more gave to the people the pillage of the merchandize exposed to sale in the court before the porch of the temple†. This is very credible; it was indeed wiser and more necessary at present than at the former period.

Profiting by the tumult, Jesus cured a great many blind and lame people. Whilst these wonders were performing on one side, they exclaimed Hosannah on the other‡. Some besought the author of these ex-

* St. Matt. xxi. St. Mark, xi. St. Luke, xix. and St. John, xii.

† St. Mark, xi. 15.

‡ St. Matt. xxi. 14. St. John, xii.

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clamations and of this tumult to stop them; but the Messiah had no longer measures to observe—He perceived it was necessary to gain over the popular enthusiasm, and that it would be silly to appease it. Besides, the uncertainty of success had thrown him into distress, which hindered him from seeing or understanding any thing. A child, frightened or too much pressed in the crowd, began to cry while Jesus was speaking, "Father, save me from this hour." They took the child's voice for a voice from heaven. St. John, moreover, informs us that the disciples had passed on the people the famous miracle of Lazarus's resurrection, which attested by eye witnesses, must have made a great impression on the astonished vulgar. They did not entertain a doubt that the voice from heaven which they had heard, was that of an angel who bore testimony to Jesus; and the latter profiting dexterously of the occasion, said to them, "This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes." He afterwards took occasion from thence to harangue the people, and announce himself as the Christ; but he spoiled his sermon by expressions which shewed the trouble into which his apprehensions had thrown him, and not knowing how to draw from the circumstance all the advantage it seemed to promise, he left the city and retired to Bethany where he passed the night with his disciples.

In general our hero was subject to low spirits,—we constantly find in him a mixture of audacity and pusillanimity. Accustomed to strike his blows in the country, and among rude and ignorant people, he did not know how to conduct himself in a city, or to succeed against vigilant and intelligent enemies.

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Thus he lost the fruit of his memorable journey, which had been so long before projected. We do not indeed find that after this he returned to Jerusalem, except to undergo his trial. Melancholy and fear had deprived him of all presence of mind, and his disciples were under the necessity of reminding him that it was time to celebrate the Passover. They asked him where he wished them to go and prepare the entertainment: He bade them take the first house they met with, which they did. A chamber was provided for them where they assembled with their master, who, ever occupied with his sorrowful thoughts, gave them to understand that this Passover would likely be the last which he should celebrate with them.—His language was mournful; he bathed their feet in order to teach them that humility was essentially necessary when they were weakest. Having afterwards sat down to table, he made them understand in language sufficiently explicit, that he was afraid of being betrayed by one of them. There is every reason to believe that his suspicions fell principally on Judas, whose frequent going to and coming from the houses of the priests might be known to his master. As Judas was treasurer to the party, and consequently charged with paying the expences of the entertainment, Jesus wished it to be understood that they were then regaled at the expense of his life and his blood. "Take," said he to them in a figurative style, "for this is my body."—Thereafter he gave them the cup, saying that it was "his blood which was to be shed for them." Judas, very readily comprehending the meaning of this enigma, arose from table, and immediately withdrew: but the other apostles did not understand it. It is, however, on this

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emblem that some doctors have since built the famous dogma of *transubstantiation;* they enjoin rational beings to believe, that *at the word of a priest bread is changed into the real body, and wine into the real blood of Christ!* They have taken the figurative words of our missionary literally, and have employed them in forming a *mystery,* or rather the most curious juggle that ever has been devised by priests on purpose to deceive mankind*.

After supper our guests retired with their master to the mount of Olives, where they thought themselves in safety; but our hero did not entertain the same opinion. Scarcely had the Man-God entered the garden of Olives when a mortal terror seized him; he wept like a child and anticipated the pangs of death. His apostles, more tranquil, yielded to sleep, and Jesus, who was afraid of being surprised, mildly reproached them—"Could you not," said he, "watch with me one hour?" Judas, whom we have seen depart suddenly, and who had not rejoined the party, gave extreme uneasiness to Christ, and every moment redoubled his terror. It is affirmed that an angel came to strengthen him in his situation: Yet he was afterwards seized with a bloody sweat, which can only denote a very great weakness.

* The Protestants are wrong in reproaching the Catholics with the dogma of *transubstantiation.* Those who believe that God could be *incarnate,* ought not to hold others ridiculous who say that God can be changed into bread. If the dogma of transubstantiation is an absurdity, it is a very ancient one in the church, and only evinces the prodigious credulity of the first of the faithful. St. Paul, St. Ignatius the martyr, St. Irenius, &c. speak of this absurd mystery like Roman Catholics.

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The agitated condition of the Saviour appears very surprising to persons in whose minds faith has not removed every difficulty the gospel presents; they are much astonished to find such weakness in a God who knew from all eternity that he was destined to die for the redemption of the human race. They aver, that God his father, without exposing his dear innocent son to such cruel torments, might by one word have pardoned guilty men, conformed them to his views, and remitted their iniquities: they think that the conduct of God would have been more simple and generous in appeasing his wrath at less expence on account of an apple eat four thousand years ago. But the ways of God are not those of men. The Deity ought never to act in a *natural* way or be easily understood. It is the essence of religion, that men should never comprehend any part of the divine conduct; this furnishes to their spiritual guides the pleasure of explaining it to them for their money.*

Whatever sentiments we may entertain on this, it is certain that the Man-God, on the approach of his death, shewed a weakness which many ordinary men would blush to display in a similar situation. Meanwhile the traitor Judas, at the head of a company of archers or soldiers, proceeded towards Jesus whose retreats he knew. A kiss was the signal by which the guards were to recognise the person whom they had orders to seize. Already Christ beheld the lanthorns

* Some have thought that the Clergy might serve as a barrier against despotism, but experience sufficiently proves that this body on all occasions stipulates for its own interests alone.—*Boulanger.*

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advancing which lighted the march of these sbirri; * and perceiving the impossibility of escaping, he made a virtue of necessity. Like a coward become desperate, he resolutely presented himself to the party; "*Whom seek ye?*" said he, with a firm tone:— "*Jesus,*" answered they. "*I am he.*" Here Judas confirmed with a kiss this heroical confession. The apostles, awakened by the noise, came to the succour of their master. Peter, the most zealous among them, cut off with a stroke of his sabre the ear of Malchus servant of the High Priest.* Jesus, observing the inutility of resistance, commanded him to put up his sword, set in order the ear of Malchus, (who escaped at the expense of being frightened,) and afterwards

* Is it not extraordinary that Jesus, who inculcated the doctrine of non-resistance so far as to enjoin that "to him who smiteth on the right cheek we should turn the left also," permitted any of his disciples to wear a sword? Does not this show that Christ himself felt the difficulty of conforming to his maxims, and at the same time fulfilling that part in society which nature has assigned to all mankind? According to Lactantius, no christian can be a soldier. The emperor Charles V. used to say that "being a warrior it was impossible for him to have either conscience or religion." His general, the Marquis de Piscaire, said, "that nothing was more difficult than to serve at one and the same time the God Mars and Jesus Christ." Generally speaking, nothing is more contrary to the spirit of Christianity than the profession of arms; nevertheless, the most christian princes have most numerous armies, and are perpetually at war. The clergy also would be extremely sorry if the maxims of the evangelists, or the Christian meekness, were to be rigidly followed. It in no wise accords with their interests. They have occasion for soldiers to give *solidity* to their doctrines and their *divine rights!*—How long, O Israel, will ye remain the dupes of an interested priesthood?

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surrendered himself to, and accompanied those who had come to seize him.

It is related that the party who came on purpose to apprehend Jesus, were forced at first to give ground.—The fact is very probable: it was dark, and the archers perceiving the apostles but very indistinctly, might believe that their enemies were more numerous than in reality, and therefore be afraid of being surrounded: but plucking up courage, they fulfilled their commission.

Whilst they bound the Son of God with cords, he besought the chief of the detachment not to molest his apostles, and as they wanted himself only, he easily obtained his request. St. John believes that Jesus made this entreaty in order to fulfil a prophecy; but it appears our hero thought it was neither useful nor just to involve men in his ruin, whose assistance might still be necessary to him, or who, being at large, would have a better opportunity to act in his favour.

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CHAPTER XV.

TRIAL AND CONDEMNATION OF JESUS.—HIS PUNISHMENT, AND DEATH.

WHEN the enemies of Jesus saw him in their hands they were not less embarrassed than before that event. From the time the Romans had subdued the Jewish nation, they had no longer the right of the sword. To punish those who had sinned against religion, it was sufficient at any former period, that the high priest pronounced sentence on the culprit. The Romans, more tolerant in this point, rarely punished with death; and, besides, to take away life they required decisive proofs against the accused.

Annanias, father-in-law of the high priest Caiphas, was known among the Jews for a very subtile man. It was to Annanias' house, therefore, that they first conducted Jesus. We are ignorant of what passsed in this first scene of the bloody tragedy of Christ; it is only to be presumed, that he underwent an examination which proved no way favourable to him.

From the house of Annanias they conducted Jesus to that of Caiphas. He was the man most interested by his office in the ruin of every innovator in matters of religion, yet we do not find that pontiff speaking with anger; he conducted himself according to law and as a man who understood his profession.—

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"Who," said he to Jesus, "are your disciples, their number and names?" Jesus made no answer.—"But at least," continued Caiphas, "explain to me your doctrine. What end does it purpose? you must have a system. Tell us then what it is." At last the Messiah condescended to say, "I spoke openly to the world; it is not I, but those who have heard me, that ought to be interrogated."

Here one of the officers of the high priest gave Jesus a blow on the ear, saying, "Answerest thou the high priest so*?" The reprimand was harsh, but it must be owned, that the answer of Christ was little respectful to a man invested with authority, and the right of putting questions in order to discover the truth from the mouth of the accused. Jesus ought to have been better acquainted with his own doctrine than the peasants of Galilee or Judea, before whom he had through preference affected to preach in an unintelligible manner. It was therefore very just and natural to suppose, that Jesus could give a better account of his true sentiments and obscure parables, than an ignorant multitude who had listened without being ever able to comprehend him. He alone could be supposed to possess the secret of uniting into system the scattered and unconnected principles of his heavenly doctrine.

Caiphas, unable to draw any thing from the accused,

* We remark with surprise that Christ forgot on this occasion to put in practice the *excellent* counsel which he had given in the sermon on the Mount,—when a person receives a blow on the one cheek, to turn the other: so true it is, that preachers do not always act as they preach to others.

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waited till next morning when the council would assemble, in order to continue this inquest. Christ appeared before the Sanhedrim, the most respectable tribunal in the nation. The gospel represents the priests and chiefs of the Jews occupied during the whole night that Jesus was arrested, in searching for and suborning *false witnesses* against him. They produced two persons, on whom they very unjustly bestowed this epithet. These witnesses indeed deposed to a fact verified by the gospel itself.—"We heard him say that he would destroy the temple, and rebuild it in three days." It is at least certain, that Jesus had uttered these words, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up*." But the poor witnesses knew not that he then spoke in his figurative style. Their mistake was pardonable, for according to the gospel, the apostles themselves did not discover the true sense of these words till after the resurrection of their master.

This evidence was not sufficient to condemn Jesus to death. The Jews, however iniquitous we may suppose them to have been, did not sentence fools to die; and these words of Christ must have appeared to them the mere effect of delirium. Accordingly the high priest contented himself with asking, what he had to answer; and as the accused refused to speak, he did not further insist on that point.

He passed then to questions more serious: "Are you the Christ?" said he to Jesus. How did the Messiah answer this question? "If I tell it you, you will not believe me, and you will not suffer me to depart. But

* St. Matt. xxvi. 61. St. Mark, xiv. 58. St. John, ii. 19—21.

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hereafter the Son of man shall sit on the right hand of God."—"You are then the Son of God?" continued the priest.—"You have said it," replied the accused. "But it is not sufficient that we should say it: it is you who are to answer; once more, are you the Christ? I conjure you by the living God tell us if you are his Son?"—"You have said it," answered Jesus: "The Son of man," (i. e. the Son of God) "shall one day come in the clouds of heaven." Notwithstanding these perplexed answers, the judges imagined they understood the meaning of his words; and they plainly perceived, that he wished to give himself out for *the Son of God.* "He hath spoken blasphemy," said they, and immediately concluded, that he deserved death*, —a judgment which was valid according to the law of the Jews, and which must also appear so to Christians, whose sanguinary laws punish with death those whom the clergy accuse of blasphemy.—The Christians have therefore no right to blame the conduct of the Jews, so often imitated by ecclesiastical and secular tribunals †.

* A devout magistrate has drawn up a memoir to prove that in the process of Jesus Christ, according to the criminal ordinance of Louis XIV. there were thirty-two nullities. There certainly would not be found any nullities according to the jurisprudence of the Inquisition, who burn blasphemers alive with a slow fire. St. Louis contented himself with making their tongues be bored with a red hot iron.

† Even the laity have considered it their duty to imitate these ferocious monsters. We every day, says Mirabaud, see that religion, or the cause of heaven, hoodwinks the humane, equitable and rational on every other occasion; so much that they make it a duty to treat those who deviate from their mode of thinking with the utmost barbarity. An heretic,

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On the other hand, if it was necessary that Christ should die; if he wished it; if the reprobation of the Jews

an incredulous person, ceases to be a man in the eyes of the superstitious. Every society infected with the venom of religion, presents innumerable examples of juridical assassinations which the tribunals commit without scruple, and without remorse. Judges, who are equitable on every other occasion, are no longer so when there is a question before them as to theology. In bathing themselves in blood they believe they conform to the views of the divinity. Almost every where the laws are subordinate to superstition, and are accomplices in its fury. They legitimate or transform into duties those cruelties which are the most contrary to the rites of humanity.—Are not all these *avengers of religion*, who, with gaiety of heart, and through piety and duty, immolate those victims to it which it appoints, blind intolerants? Are they not tyrants who have the injustice to outrage opinion, and the folly to believe that they can enslave the mind? Are they not fanatics on whom the law, dictated by inhuman prejudices, impose the necessity of becoming ferocious brutes?—Are not all those sovereigns who, to avenge heaven, torment and persecute their subjects, and sacrifice human victims to their gods, men whom religious zeal has converted into tigers? Are not those priests so careful of the soul's health, who insolently break into the sanctuary of the thoughts, to the end that they may find in the opinions of man motives for injuring him, odious knaves and disturbers of the mind's repose, whom religion honours, and whom reason detests? What villains are more odious in the eyes of humanity than those infamous *Inquisitors*, who by the blindness of princes enjoy the advantage of judging their own enemies, and committing them to the flames? Nevertheless the superstition of the people makes them respected, and the favor of kings overwhelms them with kindness. In short, do not a thousand examples prove that religion has every where produced and justified the most unaccountable horrors? Has it not a thousand times armed men with the poniards of homicides; let loose passions much more terrible

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was resolved on, Jesus acted very properly in keeping them in error. But if this was the intention of Providence, why preach to them? Why perform miracles before a whole people, whilst a small number were only to profit by it? Did Jesus wish to save them? In that case why not convince the whole Sanhedrim of his power? Why did he not burst his bonds? Why did he not by a single word change their obstinate hearts? Did he wish to destroy them? Why not then strike them dead? Why not instantly precipitate them into hell?

The judges could not comprehend why an accused person, who could not extricate himself from their hands, could be the Son of God. They accordingly declared him worthy of death; but not definitively, as it was requisite that the sentence should be approved of, and executed by the Romans, sovereigns of the nation. During these transactions, Jesus was treated in the cruellest manner by the Jews, whom as well as

than those which it pretended to restrain, and broken the most sacred bonds of mortals? Has it not, under the pretext of duty, of faith, of piety, and of zeal, favoured cruelty, stupidity, ambition and tyranny? Has not the cause of God made murder, perfidy, rebellion, and regicide, legitimate objects? Have not those princes who have frequently made themselves the avengers of heaven, the lictors of religion, hundreds of times been its victims? In fine, has not the name of God been the signal for the most dismal follies, and the most frightful and wicked outrages?—Have not the altars of the gods every where swam in blood? and under whatever form they may have exhibited the divinity, was he not always the cause or the pretext of the most insolent violation of the rights of humanity?

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Christian's zeal permitted, or rather enjoined, to be savage.

It is during this night, and the morning of the following day so fatal to the Saviour of the world, that we must place the three denials of St. Peter the chief of the apostles; yet for him his master had prayed. His comrades, seized with dismay, had dispersed themselves in Jerusalem and its neighbourhood. Several among them would have acted like Peter, if they had found themselves in a similar situation. He had at least the merit of keeping near his master; He abjured him, it is true, but would it have been of more avail if, by acknowledging him openly, Peter should have entangled himself in a very scurvy affair, without being in a condition to relieve the Saviour.

The Sanhedrim repaired to the palace of Pilate the Roman governor, in order to get the sentence confirmed. Jesus was conducted thither. Pilate instantly perceived, that it was an affair in which fanaticism and folly had the greatest share. Filled with contempt for so ridiculous a motive, he at first testified unwillingness to meddle in it. *Judge him yourselves*, said he to the magistrates. On this the latter because false witnesses. Zeal, no doubt, made them imagine, that every thing was allowed against an enemy of religion. They interested the sovereign power in their quarrel.—They accused Jesus of wishing "to make himself king of the Jews," and of having maintained, that "they ought not to pay tribute to Cæsar." We recognise here the genius of the clergy, who, to ruin their enemies, are never very fastidious in the choice of means. They especially strive to render the latter

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suspected by the temporal power, in order to engage it, through motives of self-interest, to revenge their injuries, or satiate their passions.

Pilate could not avoid paying attention to accusations of so serious a nature. Unable to persuade himself, that the man he beheld could have conceived projects so ridiculous, he interrogated him:—"Are you the king of the Jews?" On which Jesus, in his turn, interrogated Pilate, and demanded "Say you this of yourself, or have others told it you?"—"Of what consequence is it to me," returned Pilate, "that you pretend to be the king of the Jews? You do not appear to be a man much to be dreaded by the Emperor my master—I am not of your nation; I concern myself very little with your silly quarrels. Your priests are your accusers—I have my own opinion of them—but they accuse you; they deliver you into my hands—Tell me then, What have you done?" Jesus might very easily have brought himself off in this affair; but in the distress he was, his judgment began to wander; and, far from penetrating the favourable disposition of Pilate, who wished to save him, he replied, "that his kingdom was not of this world—that he was the truth," &c. On this the Governor asked him, *What is the truth?* But the Saviour made no reply, though the question well deserved a categorical answer.

Pilate, a little alarmed on account of Jesus, declared, that he "found nothing in him worthy of death:" But this redoubled the cries of his enemies. Having learned that the accused was a Galilean, he, to get quit of the ridiculous business, seized the opportunity to send him to Herod, to whose tetrarchate Jesus originally belonged. We have said elsewhere,

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that this Prince had desired to see our hero, and his desire was now gratified. But, on seeing his obstinacy and constant refusal to answer the questions put to him, he conceived a sovereign contempt for him. To Pilate, therefore, he sent him back clothed in a white robe by way of derision. The governor, however, saw no capital crime in Jesus, and wished to save him; besides, his superstitious wife had a dream, that interested her in favour of our missionary.*—Pilate then said to the Jews, that he could find nothing in the man, which rendered him worthy of death. But the people, mis-led, and wishing him to be crucified, cried out, *Tolle, Tolle,* away, away with him. The Governor now devised another plan to save him. "I release," said he, "every year a criminal; supposing that Jesus may be culpable, I am going to set him free." The cries were redoubled, and the Jews demanded, that a robber called Barabbas should profit of this mercy in preference to Jesus, whose punishment they persisted to urge.

The Romans, desirous to calm the rage of a fanatical people, caused Jesus to be whipped. Thereafter, they dressed him in a ridiculous manner, crowned him with thorns, and made him hold a reed instead of a sceptre; after which Pilate shewed him to the people, saying, "Behold your king! are you not yet satisfied? See

* John Malida, and other fabricators of legends, inform us, that the wife of Pilate was called Procla, or Procula. They have made a saint of her. Some authors have made Pilate himself a Christian, and even a martyr. Others affirm that Nero put him to death, for having been concerned in the crucifixion of Christ. Others assert, that Pilate was exiled to Vienne in Dauphine, where he killed himself.

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how to please you I have bedecked him. Be then less cruel: do not carry your indignation further: he ought no longer to give you umbrage."

The priests, whose maxim it is *never to forgive*, were not moved by this spectacle; it was only the death of their enemy that could satisfy them. They shifted their attacks, and, to intimidate the governor, gave him to understand, that by suffering the accused to live, he betrayed the interests of his master. It was then that Pilate, fearing the effects of the malice of the clergy, consigned Jesus to the Jews, that they might satisfy their rage on him, and execute their projects; declaring, however, that "he washed his hands of it," and that it was against his opinion if they put him to death. We cannot well conceive how a Roman governor, who exercised sovereign power in Judea, could yield so easily to the wishes of the Jews; but we cannot more easily conceive how God permitted this honest governor to become through weakness an accomplice in the death of his dear Son.

Jesus, abandoned to the rage of devotees, again suffered the cruellest treatment.* Pilate, to humble those

* St. Justin, Tatian, Athenagoras, Lactantius, &c. have reproached the pagans with their gods, several of whom, according to the poets, had experienced persecution and bad usage. Were not these reproaches preposterous in the mouths of the adorers of a crucified God? The partizans of one religion perceived very well the ridiculousness of their adversaries, but never saw that of their own religion. Lactantius asks the pagans, "If it is possible to take for a God an exile, obliged to fly or forced to conceal himself? Nobody," says he, "is fool enough to do so; for he who flies or conceals himself, shews that he fears violence or death."—Lanct. Instit. Divin. l. i. c. 13.

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barbarians, wished the label affixed to the upper part of the cross to bear, that he was their king: and nothing could induce him to recede from this resolution. "What is written is written," said he to those who requested him to alter an inscription dishonourable to their nation. It is also proper to observe, that this inscription is differently expressed by the four evangelists.

The Jews treated Christ as a king dethroned, and made him experience the most bloody outrages. Though he had said that, if he were inclined, he could make *legions of angels* come to his protection, yet the Jews, notwithstanding their natural credulity, paid no credit to his assertion, and nothing could stop their religious cruelty, excited by the priests. They made him take the road to Calvary. Christ sunk under the weight of his cross, but they loaded one Simon with it, who was more vigorous than him; the unfortunate Jesus must have been indeed much enfeebled by what he had suffered during both the night and the morning.

At last Christ was placed on the cross, the usual punishment of slaves. He did not suffer long under the agonies of crucifixion: after invoking his Father, and lamenting his being so shamefully abandoned, he expired, it is said, between two thieves.* Here it is pro-

* St. Matt. xxvii. 44. St. Mark, xv. 32. St. Luke, xxiii. 39, &c. It is said that Jesus when dying exclaimed. *Eli! Eli! lamma sabbactani!* (My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me!) This complaint was very ridiculous in the mouth of Christ; the part he acted having been agreed on with his father from all eternity, he ought to have known what he had to expect. At least we may suppose that this exclamation was but a feint meant to *deceive* the spectators—a conduct little becoming a divinity.

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per to remark, that the Holy Ghost, who inspired St. Mark, makes Jesus die *at the third hour*, that is, at nine o'clock in the morning, whilst the Holy Ghost, who in like manner inspired St. John, makes Jesus die *at the sixth hour*, that is, at mid-day. The Holy Ghost is not more consistent in the story of the two thieves, in whose company Jesus was crucified. St. Matthew and St. Mark tell us, that the two thieves insulted him with abusive language; while St. Luke assures us, that one only of the two abused the Saviour, and that the other reprimanded his comrade for his insolence, and besought Jesus "to remember him when he should come to his kingdom." But our interpreters have a thousand ways of proving that the Holy Ghost never contradicts himself, even when he speaks in the most contradictory manner. Those who have faith are satisfied with their arguments, but they do not so powerfully impress the freethinkers, who have the misfortune to reason.

The remorse of Judas soon revenged Jesus on this traitor. He restored to the priests the thirty pieces he had received from them, and went forthwith to hang himself.* According to St. Matthew, the selling of

* According to the gospel of *The Infancy of Jesus*, chap. xxx. Judas was possessed of a devil from his infancy, and would bite every body when the demon agitated him;—he one day bit the little Jesus on the side, who fell a weeping: Satan came out of Judas under the form of a mad dog. Codex Apocryp. N. T. tome 1. p. 197. Some heretical Christians have much esteemed Judas Iscariot, maintaining that without him the mystery of the redemption could not have been accomplished;—an idea not destitute of reason. Indeed, why blame a man, who, by selling his master, was only the instrument of the salvation of the universe, and executor of the

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Jesus for thirty pieces had been foretold by Jeremiah: it must however be observed, that the prediction does not appear in the writings of this prophet, which would create a suspicion that the evangelists, little satisfied with applying to Christ some prophecies, such as are extant in the Old Testament, have taken the liberty of drawing from their own store, or forging them when in need. But our able interpreters are not at all embarrassed with this; and a holy blindness will always prevent these bagatelles from being perceived.

The Gospel informs us, that at the death of Christ all nature seemed to take part in the grand event. At the moment he expired there was a total eclipse; a frightful shaking of the earth was felt, and several holy personages came out of their tombs to take a walk on the streets of Jerusalem.* The Jews alone had the misfortune to see nothing of all this; it appears, that these wonders were performed only in the fancy of the disciples of Jesus. As for the eclipse, it was doubtless an inconceivable prodigy, which could not have taken place without a total derangement in the machine of the world. A total eclipse of the sun during full moon, the time at which the celebration of the passover was fixed by the Jews, is of all miracles the most impossible. No contemporary author has mentioned it, though this phenomenon well merited

decrees of God himself? These heretics have also a gospel, of which they make Judas the author, St. Ireneus, b. 1. contra Hæres. c. 35.

* How then is Christ termed "the *first fruits* of them that sleep?" And what are we to make of the resurrection of Lazarus, which *preceded* this, if Jesus Christ is to be held the "*first* born from the dead?"

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to be transmitted to posterity.* The incredulous therefore maintain, that there was no eclipse on this occasion, but of the common sense of those who saw all these marvels, or of the good faith of the writers who have attested them. With respect to the shaking of the earth, they suspect that the apostles of Jesus, benumbed with fear at the sight of their divine master's fate, were the only persons who felt it. In this way indeed the thing becomes very probable.

When Jesus was dead, or believed to be so,† after an incision had been made in his side, from which came blood and a whitish fluid, which they took for water, his body was embalmed, and deposited in a tomb. This was done on Friday evening. He had several times intimated, that he would rise again the third day, that is, at the end of three days and three nights. Yet on the Sunday following, early in the morning, the

* Some writers pretend, that the eclipse here spoken of has been attested by *Thallus*, an author wholly unknown, and by *Phlegon*, whose work no longer exists, but has been cited by Julius Africanus, a Christian author of the third century. This Phlegon says merely, that in the fourth year of the 202d Olympiad there was a considerable eclipse; but this has nothing marvellous in it.

† If the punishment of Jesus is proved by the Gospel, some circumstances may create a doubt whether he died immediately. We are told, that they did not, according to custom, break his legs. His friends had the liberty of taking away his body, and they might take care of his wounds on finding that he was not dead, and in this manner bring him back to life, at least for some time. It is proper to observe, that they laid him in a tomb quite new, from whence his disciples had perhaps taken care to get him out. We however thought it our duty to follow the vulgar opinion, in supposing that Jesus was actually dead.

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tomb, wherein he had been laid, was found empty. —The Jews, always opiniative, did not admit that he was risen again. They held it more natural to believe that he had failed in his word; or to suppose that his disciples had found means to carry him off. This could easily have been executed by force; by bribing the guards, whom the priests and Pharisees had placed around his sepulchre; or by cunning. As Pilate took but little interest in the matter, we do not find that he punished the guards merely from compliance to the fears of the Jews, for neglecting to take care of what he had confided to them, and which appeared to him very ridiculous. The idolatrous governor, little acquainted with the resources or designs of the apostles, never suspected they could persuade any person, that a man, whose death was well attested, could return to life.* It was, however, on this marvel-

* It is not surprising that a pagan should doubt the resurrection of Christ. From the first day of the church, several Christians have not believed it, perceiving very plainly the incongruity of supposing that the Son of God could die; they have therefore denied the death of their divine master. On this subject the followers of Basilides affirm, that Jesus at the time of his passion assumed the appearance of Simon the Cyrenean, and transferred to him his own, under which the said Simon was crucified in his stead, while Christ, who beheld this without being himself seen, laughed at their mistake. St. Ireneus, lib. i. c. 23. S. Epiph. hæs. xxiv. num. 3. The Cerinthians, or disciples of Cerinthus, who was contemporary with the apostles, and the Carpycratians, in like manner, denied that Jesus could have been actually crucified. Some have maintained, that the traitor Judas was punished in place of his master. Yet these sectaries regarded Christ as a mere man, and not as a god. Thus we find Christians contemporary with the apostles believing in Christ, and yet, like heretics, doubting of his death. — M. de Tillemont,

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lous notion, as we shall see, that a sect was afterwards founded, powerful enough to subject by degrees the Roman empire and a considerable portion of the globe.

On the other hand, the punishment of our hero must have produced very little sensation in the world, and his adventures must have been strangely unknown, since we do not find that any historian, with the exception of the evangelists, makes mention of them.*

tome 2. p. 221. St. Epiph. hom. 24, 28, 30. Theodoret Hæretic. fab. lib. 1.

* The celebrated Blondel, le Fevre de Saumur, and other good critics, have shown, that the passage of the historian Josephus, where he speaks in praise of Jesus, has been visibly interpolated, by *a pious fraud* of Christians. This fraud is likewise very ably exposed in an excellent dissertation in manuscript by the late M. l'Abbe de Longuerue. If the passage, favourable to Jesus, had been really written by Josephus, that historian could not, without being guilty of an absurdity, dispense with becoming a Christian.

The devout forgers of writings, who anciently fabricated vouchers for the Christian religion, have taken care to counterfeit, with as much good faith, *two letters of Pilate*, addressed to the emperor Tiberius, in which this idolatrous governor speaks of Jesus, his miracles, death, and resurrection in the same tone as the most zealous disciple could have employed. We have also a testimony as authentic in a letter of one *Lentulus* to the Roman senate. Although these suppositious pieces may be now rejected by the church, they were adopted by Christians in the time of Tertullian, as may be seen in his Apolog. c. 5. 21. These letters are to be found entire in the Codex Apocryp. N. T. tome 1. p. 298, &c.

In the Appendix we have given a list of books mentioned by the fathers and other ancient writers, ascribed to Jesus and his apostles, which we see no reason for regarding as less authentic than the books composing the New Testament, at present in our hands.

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CHAPTER XVI.

RESURRECTION OF JESUS—HIS CONDUCT UNTIL HIS ASCENSION—EXAMINATION OF THE PROOFS OF THE RESURRECTION.

THE history of the life of an ordinary man terminates commonly with his death; but it is different with a Man-God who has the power of raising himself from the dead, or whom his adherents have the faculty of making rise at will. This happened to Jesus: thanks to his apostles or evangelists, we see him still playing a considerable part even after his decease.

The moment Christ was arrested, his disciples, as we have narrated, dispersed themselves in Jerusalem and the neighbourhood, with the exception of Simon Peter, who did not lose sight of him during his examination at the house of the high priest. This apostle was anxious, for his own interest, to know the result of it. Encouraging themselves on finding that Jesus had not criminated them in his examinations, the disciples re-assembled, concerted measures, and determined, as their master was dead, or reputed so, to take advantage of the notions which he had diffused during his mission. Accustomed for so long a period to lead a wandering life under his command, and subsist at the expence of the public by means of preaching, exorcisms, and miracles, they resolved to continue

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a profession more easily exercised, and incomparably more lucrative than their original occupations. They had enjoyed an opportunity of observing that it was better to catch men than fish. But how could the disciples of a man who was punished as an impostor, make themselves listened to? It was necessary to give out that their master having, during his life, raised others from the dead, had, after his own death, raised himself, in virtue of his omnipotence. Jesus had predicted it; it was therefore necessary to accomplish the prediction. The honour of the master and his disciples thereby acquired a new lustre; and the sect, far from seeing itself annihilated or disgraced, was enabled to acquire new partizans in this credulous nation.

In consequence of this reasoning, the good apostles had only to make the body of their master, dead or alive, to disappear, which, if it had remained in the tomb, would have borne evidence against them. They did not even wait till the three days and three nights in the pretended prophecy were expired. The dead body disappeared on the second day; and thus the second day after his decease, our hero, triumphing over hell and the grave, found himself revivified.*

* The ancient framers of the Gospels have fabricated one which they have ascribed to Nicodemus. In it we learn how Christ passed his time after his death till his resurrection, his journey to hell, the deliverance of the patriarchs, the discomfiture of Satan, &c. All these details are attested by two dead persons who came purposely from the other world, to acquaint Annanias, Caiphas, and the doctors of Judea, of these events. Codex. Apocryph. N. T. tome 1. p. 238, &c.

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If Christ was not yet dead of his punishment, his returrection had nothing surprising in it. If he was actually dead, the cave, where his body was deposited, might very probably have secret passages, through which they could enter and come out, without being observed or stopt by the enormous stone with which they had affected to block up its entrance, and near which the guards had been placed. Thus the dead body might have been carried off either by force or by stratagem; and perhaps it had never been deposited in the tomb at all. In whatever manner the affair was transacted, a report was circulated that Jesus was risen, and his body not to be found.

Nothing is of more importance to a Christian, than to ascertain satisfactorily the resurrection of Christ. St. Paul tells us, that "if Jesus be not risen, our hope is vain." Indeed without this miracle of Omnipotence, intended to manifest the superiority of Christ over other men, and the interest the Deity took in his success, Jesus must appear only as an adventurer, or weak fanatic, punished for having given umbrage to the priests of his country.

It is therefore requisite to examine seriously a fact, on which alone the belief of every Christian is founded. In doing this it is necessary to satisfy ourselves of the quality of the witnesses who attest the fact, whether they were acute, disinterested, and intelligent persons; if they agree in the narratives they give, or in the circumstances they relate. Such are the precautions usually employed to discover the degree of probability or evidence of facts. They are also the more necessary, when it is intended to examine *supernatural* facts, which, to be believed, require much stronger

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proofs than ordinary facts. On the unanimous testimony of some historians, we readily believe that Cæsar made himself master of Gaul; the circumstances of his conquest would be less established, were we to find them related by himself only, or his adherents; but they would appear incredible, if we found in them prodigies or facts contrary to the order of nature. We would then have reason to believe, that it was intended to impose on us; or, if we judged more favourably of the authors, we would regard them as enthusiasts and fools.

Agreeably to these principles, adopted by sound criticism, let us consider who are the witnesses that attest the marvellous, and consequently the least probable facts which history can produce. They are apostles—But who are these apostles? They are adherents of Jesus. Were these apostles enlightened men? Every thing proves that they were ignorant and rude, and that an indefatigable credulity was the most prominent trait in their character. Did they behold Jesus rising from the dead?—No;—no one beheld this great miracle. The apostles themselves did not see their master coming out of the grave; they merely found that his tomb was empty; but this by no means proves that he had risen. It will however be said, the apostles saw him afterwards and conversed with him, and that he likewise shewed himself to some women, who knew him very well. But these apostles and these women, did they see distinctly? Did not their prepossessed imaginations make them see what did not exist? Is it absolutely certain that their master was dead before they laid him in the tomb?

In the *second* place, were these witnesses *disinterested*? The apostles and disciples of Jesus were doubt-

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less interested in the glory of the master they had followed during the course of his mission. Their interests were confounded with those of a man who enabled them to subsist without toil. Several among them expected to be recompensed for their attachment to him, by the favours which he promised to bestow on them in the kingdom he was about to establish. Finding these hopes destroyed by the death, real or supposed, of their chief, most of the apostles, persuaded that all was over, lost courage; but others, less daunted, conceived that it was not necessary *to throw the handle after the hatchet;* that they might profit still by the impressions which the preaching of Christ and his wonders had made on the people. They believed that their master might again return, or, if they supposed him dead, they could feign that he had foretold he would rise again. They therefore agreed that it was proper to circulate the report of his resurrection; to say that they had seen him; and to assert that Jesus had triumphantly come out of the tomb: which would appear very credible in the case of a personage who had evinced himself capable of raising others from the dead. Knowing the imbecility of those they had to deal with, they presumed that the people were prepared long before hand to believe the marvellous wonder which they intended to announce. They conceived, that, in order to subsist, it was necessary to continue preaching the doctrine of a man who would not have attracted an audience, if it had not been taken for granted that he was risen again. They felt that it was necessary to preach the resurrection of Christ, or consent to perish with hunger. They foresaw, moreover, that it was necessary to brave

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chastisement and even death, rather than renounce an opinion or doctrine on which their daily subsistence and welfare absolutely depended. Hence unbelievers conclnde, that the witnesses of the resurrection of Christ were any thing but disinterested, and were spurred on by the principle, that *he who risks nothing, gains nothing.*

In the *third* place, are the witnesses of the resurrection of Christ *unanimous* in their evidence? Much more, are they consistent with themselves in the narratives they give? We find neither the one nor the other. Though Jesus, according to some of the evangelists, had foretold in the most positive manner, that he would rise again*, St. John makes no mention of this prediction, but expressly declares, that the disciples of Jesus *knew not that he must rise again from the dead*†. This denotes in them a total ignorance of that great event, said, however, to have been announced by their master; and creates a suspicion that these predictions of Christ were piously invented afterwards, and inserted in process of time into the text of St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke. Yet nothing can be more positive than the manner in which St. Matthew speaks of the prediction; he supposes it so well known by the public, that he affirms, the priests and Pharisees went to Pilate, and told him, *We remember this deceiver said while he was yet alive, that after three days he would rise again*‡. We do not, however, find in any of the evangelists a passage where this resurrection is foretold in so public and decided a man-

* St. Matt. xxvi. 32. St. Mark, xvi. 28.

† St. John, xx. 9. ‡ St. Matt. xxvii. 63.

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ner. St. Matthew himself relates only the answer of Jesus to those who demanded of him a sign; it consisted, as we have elsewhere said, in referring them to "Jonas, who was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale; so," said he, "shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*." Now Jesus, having died on Friday, at the ninth hour, or mid-day, and risen again the second day early in the morning, was not, as we have already remarked, "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Besides, the obscure manner in which Christ expressed himself in this pretended prediction, could not enable the priests and Pharisees to conclude that Jesus must die and rise again, or to excite their alarm, unless it is pretended, that, on this occasion, these enemies of Christ received by a particular revelation the interpretation of the mysterious prediction.

St. John tells us, that when Jesus was taken down from the cross by Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, in order to embalm him, brought a mixture of aloes and myrrh, weighing about a hundred pounds, and that he afterwards took the body, wrapt it in a clean linen cloth, furnished spices according to the custom practised by the Jews in their funeral ceremonies, and laid it in the tomb†. Thus was Jesus embalmed, carried away, and buried. On the other hand, St. Matthew and St. Luke tell us that this sepulture and embalming were performed in presence of Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus‡, who, consequently must have known what Nicodemus

* St. Matt. xii. 38, &c. † St. John, xix. 39—40.

‡ St. Matt. xxvii. 61. St. Mark, xv. 47. St. Luke, xxiii, 55.

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had done; yet St. Mark, forgetting all this, tells us, that these same women *brought sweet spices* (aromatics) *in order to embalm his body*, and came for that purpose early in the morning of the day subsequent to the Sabbath*. St. Luke has no better memory, and informs us, that these ladies came also to embalm a dead body, which according to St. John, had already received *a hundred pounds weight* of aromatics, and was inclosed in a sepulchre, the entrance of which was blocked up by a massy stone, which embarrassed the women as much at finding it as the incredulous are with these contradictions of our evangelists†.

These ladies, however, who dreaded the obstacle of the stone, did not dread the obstacle of the guard which St. Matthew placed at the entrance of the tomb. But if these women knew that Christ was to rise again at the end of three days, why were they so careful in embalming his body?—unless indeed we suppose that Jesus made a secret to his mother and the tender Magdalane of an event which it is asserted was publicly predicted, and which was perfectly well known not only by his disciples, but also by the priests and Pharisees, of whose extraordinary precautions we are informed by St. Matthew. According to this evangelist, these precautions were founded on the fear the priests were under, that the disciples of Jesus "should come and carry away his body, and afterwards say unto the people, that he is risen from the dead; an error, which, in their opinion, would be more dangerous than the first." Nevertheless we find some women and disciples continually roaming about the tomb, going

* St. Mark, xvi. 1. † St. Luke, xxiv. 1.

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and coming freely, and offering to embalm the same dead body twice. It must be acknowledged that all this surpasses human understanding*.

It is not more easy to conceive the conduct of the guards placed near the tomb at the solicitation of the priests, or that of the priests themselves. According to St. Matthew, these guards, terrified at the resurrection of Christ, ran to Jerusalem to tell the priests, "that the angel of the Lord had descended from heaven, and taken away the stone which blocked up the tomb; and that at the sight of him they had nearly expired through fear." On this the priests, not at all doubting the truth of the relation of the guards, enjoined them to say publicly that the disciples of Jesus had carried away his body during the night, and while they were asleep. They also gave the soldiers money to speak in this manner, and promised to pacify the governor, if he wished to punish them for their negligence†.

As to this narrative, it is proper to observe, that the guards did not say they had seen Jesus rise from the dead; they pretended merely to have seen "the angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, and rolling away the stone which was at the entrance of the tomb." Thus this history announces *an apparition* only, and not *a resurrection*. We might explain it in a manner natural enough by supposing that during the night, while the guards were buried in sleep, the adherents of Jesus came by the light of flambeaus, with an armed force, to open the tomb and intimidate the soldiers taken unawares, who in the alarm they ex-

* St. Matt. xxvii. 62—66. † St. Matt. xxviii.

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perienced imagined they had seen their prey taken out of their hands by a preternatural power, and that they afterwards affirmed all this in order to justify themselves.

The most singular circumstance is the conduct of the priests, who believed in earnest the relation of the guards, and consequently gave credit to a miracle strong enough to convince them of the power of Jesus. But far from being moved by the prodigy, which they thus believed, they gave money to the soldiers to engage them to tell, not the incident as it occurred, but that the disciples of Jesus came by night to take away the body of their master. On the other hand, the guards, who must have been more dead than alive through terror at the spectacle they had witnessed, accepted money for publishing a falsehood: a conduct for which the angel of the Lord might very properly have punished them. Far, however, from dreading punishment, these soldiers for a sum of money consented to betray their consciences. But could the Jewish priests, however base we may suppose them, be silly enough to imagine that these men, after having witnessed so terrible a miracle, would be very faithful in preserving the secret? It must have been an insignificant miracle indeed which could make no impression either on the soldiers who had seen it, or on the priests who believed it on the relation of these soldiers. If the priests were convinced of the reality of the miracle, was it not natural that they should recognise Jesus for the Messiah, and that they should unite with him in labouring to deliver their country from the yoke of idolaters?

On this occasion indeed, the angel of the Lord

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seems to have bungled the affair, by so terrifying the soldiers that they fled without having time to see Jesus rising from the dead, whose resurrection, however, was the object of all this pompous preparation. Very far from allowing it to be seen by any one, this awkward angel chased away the guards who ought to have been the witnesses of the mighty wonder.

It appears in fact, that the transaction of Jesus' resurrection was seen by nobody. His disciples did not see it; the soldiers, who guarded his tomb, did not see it; and the priests and Jews did not hold this fact to be so memorable as some persons who beheld no part of it. It was only after his resurrection that Jesus shewed himself. But to whom did he shew himself? To disciples interested in saying that he was risen again; to women, who to the same interest joined also weak minds and ardent imaginations, disposed to form phantoms and chimeras.

These remarks will enable us to judge of all the pretended appearances of Jesus after his resurrection. Besides, the evangelists are not unanimous as to these appearances. St. Matthew relates, that Jesus shewed himself to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary; while St. John makes mention of Mary Magdalene singly. St. Matthew tells us, that Jesus shewed himself to the two Marys on the road whilst returning from the sepulchre on purpose to apprise the disciples of what they had seen. St. John informs us, that Mary Magdalene, after visiting the sepulchre, went and carried the news to the disciples, and thereafter returned to this same sepulchre, where she beheld Jesus in the company of angels. St. Matthew affirms, that the two Marys embraced the feet of Jesus. St. John says,

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Jesus forbade Magdalane to touch him. St. Matthew informs us, that Jesus bade the two Marys tell his disciples *that he was going into Galilee.* St. John says, Jesus ordered Mary to acquaint his disciples, *that he was going to his Father;* that is, to heaven.—But it is more singular still, that, according to St. Mark, the disciples themselves were not inclined to credit the apparition of Christ to Magdalane; agreeably to St. Luke, they treated all that she told them of angels as reveries. According to St. John, Magdalane herself did not at first believe that she had seen her adorable lover, whom she took for the gardener.*

There is no greater certainty in the apparition of Jesus to St. Peter and St. John. These two apostles went to the sepulchre, but they did not find their dear master. According to St. John, he himself saw neither Jesus nor the angels. From St. Luke it appears, that these apostles arrived after the angels were gone; and from St. John, before the angels had arrived. The witnesses are indeed very little unanimous as to these angels, who seem to have been seen only by the good ladies, whom they charged to announce to the disciples the resurrection of Jesus. St. Matthew makes mention of one angel only, whom St. Mark calls *a young man.* St. John affirms, that there were two.

It is said, that Jesus shewed himself again to two disciples of Emaus, called *Simon and Cleophas;* but they did not recognize him, though they had lived familiarly with him. They proceeded a long while in his company without suspecting who he was—a cir-

* St. Matt. xxviii. St. John xx. St. Luke, xxiv. 11. St. Mark xvi.

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cumstance which, undoubtedly, evinced a very strange failure of memory. It is true, St. Luke tells us that their *eyes were as if shut.* Is it not very singular that Jesus should shew himself in order not to be known again? They, however, recognized him afterwards; but immediately dreading, as it would seem, to be seen too nearly, the phantom disappeared. The two disciples went immediately and announced the news to their brethren assembled at Jerusalem, where Jesus arrived fully as soon as they.

St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke, agree in telling us, that when the disciples were informed of the resurrection of Jesus, they saw him for the first and last time. But the author of the Acts of the Apostles, St. John, and St. Paul, contradict this assertion, for they speak of several other appearances, which afterwards occurred. St. Matthew and St. Mark inform us that the disciples received orders to go and join Jesus in Galilee; but St. Luke and the author of the Acts (i. e. the same St. Luke) says, that the disciples were ordered not to go out of Jerusalem. With respect to this last apparition, St. Matthew places it on *a mountain in Galilee,* where Jesus had fixed the rendezvous for the evening of the day of his resurrection; whilst St. Luke informs us, that it was at Jerusalem, and tells us, that immediately thereafter Christ ascended into heaven, and disappeared for ever. Yet the author of the Acts of the Apostles is not of this opinion; he maintains, against himself, that Jesus tarried still forty days with his disciples, in order to instruct them.

There still remain to be considered two appearances of Jesus to his apostles, the one at which Thomas was not present, and refused to believe those who assured

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him of their having seen their master, and the other when Thomas recognised his master, who shewed him his wounds. To render one of these apparitions more marvellous, they assure us, that Jesus was seen in the midst of his disciples, *whilst the doors were shut.* But this will not appear surprising to those who know that Christ, after his resurrection, had an *immaterial* or *incorporeal* body, which consequently could make itself a passage through the smallest orifices. His disciples took him for a *spirit:* yet this *spirit* had wounds, was palpable, and took food. But perhaps all this was only chimerical, and those apparitions mere illusions of sense. Indeed, how could the apostles be assured of the reality of what they saw? A being who has the power of changing the course of nature, can destroy all the rules by which we judge of certainty: and on this supposition the apostles could never be certain of having seen Christ after his resurrection.

St. John speaks of several appearances of Jesus to his disciples, of which no mention is made by the other evangelists: hence we see that his testimony destroys theirs, or that theirs destroy his. As to the apparitions of Jesus which St. Paul mentions, he was not a witness of them, and knew them only by hearsay; we find him accordingly speaking of them in a manner very little exact. He says, for example, that Jesus shewed himself "to the twelve," while it is evident, that, by the death of Judas, the apostolic college was reduced to eleven. We are surprised to see these inaccuracies in an inspired author; they may render suspicious what he likewise says of the apparition of Jesus to five hundred of the brethren at once*. As to him-

* 1 Cor. xv. 6.

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self we know, that he never saw his master but in a *vision*,* and considering the testimonies on which the resurrection of Jesus is founded, perhaps we may say as much of the other apostles and disciples. They were Jews, enthusiasts, and prophets; and consequently subject to dreaming even while awake. The incredu-

* St. Paul himself informs us that he was ravished up to the third heaven. But why was he transported thither, and what did he learn by his journeys? — *Things unspeakable, which no man could comprehend.* What advantage are mankind to derive from all this? In the Acts of the Apostles, we find that this same Paul was guilty of a falsehood in saying before the High Priest, that he was persecuted *because he was a Pharisee, and on account of the resurrection.* Here, in fact, are two untruths. First, Paul was not a Pharisee at the time, but a most zealous apostle of the Christian religion, and consequently a Christian. Secondly, the accusations brought against him did not refer to his opinion on the resurrection. If we know that the apostles sometimes wandered from the truth, how shall we believe them on other occasions? We indeed find this great apostle continually changing his counsels and conduct. At Jerusalem he strenuously opposed Peter because he favoured Judaism, while he himself shortly after complied with Jewish rites; and boasted that he always accommodated himself to the circumstances of the times, *and became all things to all men.* By this he set an example to the Jesuits in India, who were reproached with having united the worship of the Pagans to that of Christ. We do not know that the protestant Christians of the present day, who are employed as missionaries in Hindostan, are as accommodating as their brethren the Jesuits: but this we know by no less an authority than official documents recently laid on the table of the House of Commons, that we Christians make a traffic of the Pagan religion in India, by actually compelling the natives to pay a tax *for admission to their own temples to worship the Idol Jaggernaut!*

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lous consider this to be the most favourable opinion they can form of witnesses who attest the resurrection of the Saviour, on which however the Christian religion is solely established.

It appears indeed most certain, from the nature of the testimonies we have examined, that Providence has in a singular manner neglected to give to an event so memorable and of such great importance, the authenticity it seemed to require. Laying aside faith, which never experiences any difficulty about proofs, no man can believe facts, even the most natural, from vouchers so faulty, proofs so weak, relations so contradictory, and testimonies so suspicious as those which the evangelists furnish us on the most incredible and marvellous occurrence that was ever related. Independent of the visible interest these historians had in establishing the belief of the resurrection of their master, and which ought to put us on our guard against them, they seem to have written merely to contradict one another, and reciprocally weaken their testimonies. To adopt relations, in which we have only a tissue of inconclusiveness, contradictions, improbable facts, and absurdities, calculated to destroy all confidence in history, requires indeed grace from above. Yet Christians do not for a moment doubt the resurrection; and their belief in this respect is founded on *a rock*, that is, according to infidels, on prejudices they have never examined, and to which, from early infancy, their spiritual guides have prudently attached the greatest importance. They teach them to immolate on the altar of faith, reason, judgment, and good sense: —After this sacrifice, it is no longer difficult to make them acknowledge, without enquiry, the most palpa-

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ble absurdities for truths, on which it is not permitted even to be sceptical.

It is in vain, that people of sense demonstrate the falsity of these pretended truths; it is in vain, that an intelligent critic stands up against interested testimonies, visibly suggested by enthusiasm and imposture; it is in vain, that humanity exclaims against wars, massacres, and horrors without number, which absurd disputes on absurd dogmas have occasioned. They silence people by saying, that "it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nought the understanding of the prudent.—Where is the wise? Where are the scribes? (the doctors of the law). Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world by causing the foolishness of the gospel to be preached*?" It is by such declamations against reason and wisdom, that fanatics and impostors have succeeded in banishing good sense from the earth, and fashioning slaves who make a merit of subjecting reason to faith, of extinguishing a sacred torch, which would conduct them with certainty, on purpose to lead them astray in the darkness these interested guides know how to infuse into minds. To degrade reason is an outrage against God its author; and it is an outrage against man who is thereby reduced to the condition of brutes.

The dogma of the resurrection of Jesus is only attested by men whose subsistence depended on that absurd romance; *and as roguery continually belies itself*, these lying witnesses could not agree among themselves in their evidence. They tell us, that Jesus had

* 1 Cor. i. 9, &c.

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publicly predicted his own resurrection. He ought therefore to have risen again publicly; he ought to have shewn himself, not in secret to his disciples, but openly to priests, Pharisees, doctors, and men of understanding, especially after having intimated, that it was *the only sign which would be given them.* Was it not acknowledging the falsehood of his mission, to refuse the sign by which he had solemnly promised to prove the truth of that mission? Was it reasonable to require the Jews to believe, on the word of his disciples, a fact which he could have convinced them with their own eyes? How is it possible for rational persons of the present age to believe, after the lapse of eighteen hundred years, on the discordant testimonies of four interested evangelists, fanatics, or fabulists, a fact which they could not make be believed in their own time, except by a small number of imbecile people, incapable of reasoning, fond of the marvellous, and of too limited understandings to escape the snares laid for their simplicity.* A Roman governor, a tetrarch, a Jewish high priest, converted by the apparition of Christ, would have made a greater impression on a man of sense than a hundred secret apparitions to his chosen disciples. The conversion of the Sanhedrim at Jerusalem to the faith, would have been of greater weight than all the obscure rabble which the apostles prevailed on to believe their improbable marvels, and persuaded that they had seen Christ alive after his death.

* So stupid indeed were the Jewish people, that Apollonius said to them, "The Jews were the most trifling of all the barbarians, and that they were the only people who had never found out any thing useful for life." *Josephus against Apion,* lib. 2.

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If the apparitions of Jesus to his apostles were not obviously fables invented by roguery, or adopted through enthusiasm and ignorance, the motive of these clandestine visits cannot be divined. Become incapable of suffering, re-established in his divine omnipotence, was he still afraid of the Jews? Could he dread being put to death a second time? By shewing himself, had he not better reason to flatter himself with converting them, than he derived from all his sermons and miracles?

But it is said, that the Jews by their opposition deserved to be rejected; that the views of Providence were changed; and that God no longer wished his chosen people should be converted. These answers are so many insults to the divinity. How is it possible for men to withstand God? Is it not to deny the Divine Omnipotence to pretend that man can oppose its will? Man, it is asserted, is free: but must not a God who knew every thing, have foreseen that the Jews would abuse their liberty by resisting his will? In that case why send them his Son? Why make him suffer to no purpose an infamous and cruel death? Why not send him at once to creatures disposed to hear him, and render him their homage? To pretend that the views of Providence were changed, is it not to attack the divine immutability? unless indeed it be said, that the Deity had from all eternity resolved on this change—which, however, will not shelter that immutability.

Thus in whatever point of view we contemplate the matter, it will remain a decided fact, that the resurrection of Christ, far from being founded on solid proofs, unexceptionable testimony, and respectable authority,

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is obviously established on falsehood and knavery, which pervade every page of the discordant relations of those who have pretended to vouch it.

After having made their hero revive and shew himself, we know not how often, to his trusty disciples, it was necessary in the end to make him disappear altogether—to send him back to heaven, in order to conclude the romance. But our story-tellers are not more in union on this disappearance than on other things. They agree neither as to the time nor the place of Jesus' ascension. St. Mark and St. Luke inform us, that Christ, after having shewn himself to the eleven apostles, while they were at table, and spoke to them, ascended into heaven. St. Luke however adds, that he conducted them out of Jerusalem as far as Bethany; and there he lifted up his hands and blessed them, and was afterwards carried up into heaven. St. Mark contradicts St. Luke, and makes Jesus ascend to heaven from Galilee: and as if he had seen what passed on high, places him on the right hand of God, who on this occasion yielded to him the place of honour*. St. Matthew and St. John do not speak of this ascension. If we referred it to them, we must presume, that Jesus is still on earth, for, according to the first of these evangelists, his last words to his disciples gave them to understand, that "he would remain with them until the end of the world." To fix our ideas on this subject, St. Luke tells us, as we have seen, that Jesus ascended into heaven the very evening

* The fable of the ascension of Christ is visibly borrowed from that of the ascension of Romulus and Julius Cæsar, which Lantantius however finds very ridiculous. Lactant. Institut. b. 1. 15.

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of the day of the resurrection. But the same St. Luke, who is supposed to be the author of the Acts of the Apostles, informs us, that Jesus tarried *forty days after his resurrection* with his dear disciples. Faith only can extricate us from this embarrassment. St. John advances nothing on the matter, but leaves us in uncertainty as to the time which Jesus passed on earth after his resurrection. Some unbelievers on observing the romantic style reigning in the gospel on this apostle, have concluded from the manner in which he finishes his history, that he meant to give free course to the fables which might afterwards be published about Christ. He terminates his narrative with these words; "Jesus did also many other things, and if they should be written every one, I suppose, that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written;" and with this hyperbole, the well-beloved apostle finishes the Platonic romance which he made on his master*.

* We have already given examples of the fables contained in the different gospels, published and adopted by the different sects of Christianity. These fables demonstrates both the impudent juggling of the forgers who composed such romances, and the astonishing stupidity of the different sectaries who believe them.—It is also proper to observe, that the *Acts of the Apostles*, composed by St. Luke, relate, only with minuteness the transactions of St. Paul, his master, and give us scarcely any information of the success or fate of his bretheren. Yet other romance writers have worthily supplied this defect. One *Abdias*, among others, has transmitted us in nine books the *Apostolic History*, but fraught with so many fables, prodigies, and adsurdities, that the church thought itself obliged to reject them, at a time when its children had no longer the simplicity of the first ages. Ignorance however has at times yielded to this ancient

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CHAPTER XVII.

GENERAL REFLECTIONS ON THE LIFE OF CHRIST.—PREACHING OF THE APOSTLES.—CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL.—ESTABLISHMENT OF CHRISTIANITY.—PERSECUTIONS IT SUFFERS.—CAUSES OF ITS PROGRESS.

THE mere reading of the life of Jesus, such as we have presented it, according to the monuments which Christians respect as inspired, must be sufficient to undeceive every thinking being. But it is the property of superstition to prevent thinking: it benumbs the soul, confounds the reason, perverts the judgment, renders doubtful the most obvious truths, and makes a merit with its slaves of despising enquiry, and of relying blindly on the word of those who govern them. It is not unseasonable, therefore, to bring again under review, some reflections, which may be useful to those readers who have not courage to draw out of the enquiry we have made, the consequences which naturally result from it; and thus aid them in forming rational ideas of the Christ they adore, of his disciples whom

credulity; and weak people and knaves have existed, who piously revived the fables and traditions of the ancient romantic writers. These are the only memoirs we possess concerning the apostles: specimens of them will be found at the end of tome 1. of the Codex Apocryph. N. T.

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they revere, and of books which they are accustomed to regard as divine.

Our examination of the birth of Christ ought to render it very suspicious. We have found the Holy Ghost mistaken on that important article of Jesus' life; for he inspired two evangelists with two very different genealogies. Notwithstanding so striking a blunder, and the consanguinity of the Virgin Mary and Elizabeth, wife of the priest Zacharias, we shall not cavil on these points:—we shall grant, that Mary might really be of the race of David:—many examples demonstrate, that the branches of races more illustrious have fallen into misery. Departing also from the supposition, that Mary, the *immaculate* wife of Joseph, may have willingly yielded to the angel; or, simple and devout, may have been deceived by the angel, there is every reason to believe, that she afterwards taught her son his descent from David, and perhaps some marvellous circumstances, which, by justifying the mother, might kindle the enthusiasm of the child. Thus, at a very early age, Jesus might be really persuaded both of his royal extraction, and of the wonders which had accompanied his birth. These ideas might afterwards inflame his ambition, and by degrees make him believe that he was destined to play a grand part in his native country. Prepossessed with these sublime notions, he concluded with being convinced of their authenticity, and intoxicating himself more and more by the perusal of obscure prophecies, and the study of traditions spread abroad in his own country. It is then very possible, that our adventurer might have come to believe himself actually called by the Divinity, and pointed out by the prophets to be the reformer, the

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chief, and the Messiah of Israel. He was indeed a visionary, and found people silly enough to be caught by his reveries*.

Another cause might likewise contribute to heat the brain of our missionary. Some learned men have conjectured, with much appearance of truth, that Jesus framed his morality, and acquired his knowledge in the house of a kind of monks, or Jewish Cœnobites, (friars) called Therapeutes or Essenians. We certainly find a striking conformity between what Philo tells us of these pious enthusiasts, and the sublime precepts of Christ. The Therapeutes quitted father and mother, wife, children, and property, in order to apply themselves to contemplation. They explained the scripture in a manner purely allegorical; they abstained from all oaths; they lived in common; they suffered with resolution the misfortunes of life, and died with joy†. From all which it may be concluded,

* It is an ardent and tender temperament that produces mystic devotion. Hysterical women are those who commonly love God with most vivacity; they love him to distraction as they would love a man. In monasteries, most of the devotees are of this description. Their imaginations grow wild, and they give to their God, whom they paint in the most captivating colours, that tenderness which they are not permitted to bestow on beings of their own species. *Christianity Unveiled.*

† See Philo on *Contemplative Life.* The first fathers of the church, struck with the conformity between the manners which Philo attributes to the Therapeutes, and those of the first Christians, do not entertain a doubt that they were the persons this learned Jew meant to point out under the name of Therapeutes, or contemplative Essenians. It is certain, that, in the time of the historian Josephus, three sects were reckoned in Judea, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the

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either that Jesus had been a Therapeute before his preaching, or at least that he had borrowed their doctrines.

Whatever may be in this, in the midst of an ignorant and superstitious nation; perpetually fed with oracles and pompous promises; miserable at that time, and discontented with the Roman yoke; continually cajoled with the expectation of a deliverer, who was to restore them with honour; our enthusiast, without difficulty, found an audience, and, by degrees, adherents. Men are naturally disposed to listen to, and believe, those who make them hope for an end to their miseries. Misfortunes render them timorous and credulous, and lead them to superstition. A fanatic easily makes conquests among a wretched people. It is not then wonderful, that Jesus should very soon acquire partizans, especially among the populace, who in every country are easily seduced.

Our hero knew the weakness of his fellow-citizens. They wanted prodigies, and he, in their eyes, performed them. A stupid people, totally strangers to the natural sciences, to medicine, or to the resources of artifice, easily mistook very simple operations for miracles, and attributed effects to the finger of God which might be owing to the knowledge Jesus had

Essenians, or Essenes. From the time of that writer, there is no longer any mention made of the latter; hence some learned men have concluded, that these Essenians, or Therapeutes, were afterwards confounded and incorporated with the first Christians, who, according to every evidence, led a manner of life perfectly similar to theirs. Le Clerc Biblioth. Universelle, tom. 4. p. 525, &c. and Bernard's Nouvelles de la Republ. des Lettres, tom. 35. p. 503.

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acquired during the long interval that preceded his mission.* Nothing in the world is more common than the combination of enthusiasm and imposture; the most sincere devotees, when they intend to advance what they believe to be the word of God, or to make religion prosper, often countenance frauds, which they style pious. There are but few zealots who do not even think crimes allowable when the interests of religion are concerned. In religion, as at play, *one begins with being dupe and ends with being knave.*

Thus, on considering things attentively, and weighing the particulars of the life of Christ, we must rest persuaded, that he was a fanatic, who really thought himself inspired, favoured by Heaven, sent to his nation, and in short the Messiah;—that to support his divine mission, he made no difficulty to employ frauds the best calculated to succeed with a people to whom miracles were absolutely necessary, and whom, without miracles, the most eloquent harangues, the wisest precepts, the most intelligent counsels, and the truest principles, could never have convinced.—In a word, a medley of enthusiasm and juggling appears to constitute the character of Jesus, and it is that of almost all spiritual adventurers who assume the name of Reformers, or become the chiefs of a sect.

* The want of experience in every country has nearly produced the same effects. The Americans considered the Spaniards Gods because they used gunpowder, rode on horseback, and had vessels which sailed quite alone. The inhabitants of the island of Tenian, having no knowledge of fire before they were visited by Europeans, took them for animals the first time they saw them, who devoured wood.

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We always find Christ, during his mission, preaching the kingdom of his Father, and supporting his preaching with wonders. At first he spoke only in a very reserved manner of his quality of Messiah, Son of God, and Son of David. There was prudence in not giving himself out for such.—But he suffered the secret to be revealed by the mouth of the devil, to impose silence on whom he commonly took great care! not, however, until after the devil had spoken in a manner sufficiently intelligible to make an impression on the spectators. He thus, with the assistance of his possessed, his proselytes, or his convulsionaries, procured testimonies in his behalf, which from his own mouth would have been very suspicious, and might have rendered him odious.

Our operator also took care to choose his ground for performing miracles; he constantly refused to operate his wonders before persons whom he supposed inclined to criticise them. If he sometimes performed them in the synagogues, and in presence of the doctors, it was in the certainty that the less fastidious populace, who believed in his miracles, would take his part, and defend him against the evil designs of the more acute spectators.*

The apostles of Jesus appear to have been men of their master's temper, either credulous or mis-led en-

* In like manner, some years ago in Paris, on the tomb of *Deacon Paris*, miracles were wrought in presence of very intelligent persons, who dared neither to criticise nor contradict them, for fear of being maltreated by a populace obstinate in seeing prodigies, and whom impostors would not have failed to excite against those who should have pretended to see only rogueries.

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thusiasts, adroit cheats, or often both together. There is every reason to believe that Christ, who had skill in men, admitted into his intimate confidence those only in whom he remarked the most submissive credulity or the greatest address. On important occasions, such as the miracle of multiplying the loaves, the transfiguration, &c. we find, as already noticed, that he used always the ministry of Peter, James, and John.

It is easy to conceive that his disciples and adherents were much attached to him, either by the ties of interest or of credulity. The most crafty perceived, that their fortunes could only be ameliorated under the conduct of a man who knew how to impose on the vulgar, and make his followers live at the expence of charitable devotees. Fishermen, formerly obliged to subsist by a labour painful and often attended with insuccess, conceived that it was more advantageous to attach themselves to a missionary, who made them live comfortably without trouble. The most credulous expected always to make a brilliant fortune, and occupy posts of eminence in the new kingdom their chief intended to establish*.

The hopes and comforts of both vanished on the death of Jesus. The most pusillanimous lost courage,

* It was evidently from *earthly* or interested motives, and not heavenly, that the apostles attached themselves to Christ. At the last supper there was a strife amongst them *who should be accounted the greatest.* "The meanest," as Bishop Parker expressed it, "hoped at least to have been made lord mayor of Capernaum." And even at his ascension the only question his disciples asked, was, *Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom of Israel?*

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but the most able and subtle did not think themselves under the necessity of abandoning the party. They therefore contrived, as we have seen, the tale of the *resurrection*, by the aid of which both the reputation of their master and their own fortune were secured. It also appears, that these apostles never sincerely believed their master was a God. The Acts incontestibly demonstrate this fact. The same Simon Peter who had recognised Jesus for the Son of the living God, declared in his first sermon, that he was man. "Ye know," says he, "that Jesus of Nazareth was a MAN whom God hath rendered famous among you—Yet ye have crucified him—but God hath raised him up again," &c.* This passage proves most clearly, that the chief of the apostles dared not yet hazard, or was wholly ignorant of the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus, which was afterwards contrived by the self-interest of the clergy, and adopted by the foolishness of Christians, whose credulity was never startled by the greatest absurdities; and self-interest and foolishness have perpetuated this doctrine until our time. By dint of repeating the same tales for so long a period, they have succeeded in making people believe the most ridiculous fables. The religion of the children is always regulated by the fancy of their fathers†.

* Acts of the Apostles, ii. 22—25.

† The word *Trinity* was *first* used by Theophilus, bishop of Antioch, in the year 150, to express *persons*, as they are called, in the Godhead. The passage in the 1st Epistle of John, c. 5. v. 7. never appeared till the 2d edition of Erasmus's N. T. about 1560. The 1st edition was printed in 1514, and the text alluded to *is not in it.*

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It appears, however, that the apostles of Jesus, deprived of the counsels of their master, would not have succeeded in procuring their doctrine to be adopted, if they had not found powerful succours after his death, and wisely selected for associates men more adroit than themselves, and better calculated for the business. They deliberated together on their common interests; it was then the Holy Ghost descended on them; that is, they considered on the means of earning a subsistence, gaining proselytes, and increasing the number of their adherents, in order to secure themselves against the enterprises of the priests and grandees of the nation, whom the new sect might have very much displeased. The latter, little satisfied with having put Jesus to death, had also the imprudence to persecute his adherents. They engaged Herod to destroy James the brother of Christ; finally they caused Stephen to be stoned. These priests and doctors did not perceive, that persecution is the surest method of spreading fanaticism, and that it always gives importance to the party persecuted.

Accordingly this persecuting spirit, inherent in the clergy, served only to make new partisans to the persecuted sect. Bad treatment, imprisonments, and punishments, always render sectaries more obstinate, and interesting objects to those who witness their sufferings. Tortures excite our pity in behalf of the person who endures them. Every fanatic that is punished is certain of finding credulous friends, who aid him, because they persuade themselves it is for religion he is persecuted.

The persecution, instigated by the priests, also made the new sectaries perceive, that it was of the utmost

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importance to them to unite their interests. They felt it necessary to avoid quarrels, and every thing which could create division; they in consequence lived in concord and peace.

The apostles, now become heads of the sect, neglected not their own interests. One of the first faculties with which the Holy Ghost inspired them, was to profit by devout souls, and engage them to place all their property in common. The apostles were the depositaries of these goods; and had under their orders ministers or servants, known by the name of deacons, charged with the distribution of alms. There is every reason to believe, that these great saints did not forget themselves in these distributions. It appears also, that the law for this communion of goods, was observed with rigour, as we find, in the Acts of the Apostles, Ananias and Saphira struck dead on the prayer of St. Peter, for having had the temerity to retain a portion of their own property:—a conduct which would appear as unjust as barbarous in any other person but an apostle of Christ. It must however be acknowledged, that the law which obliged the rich to place their property in common, was very important, not only to the apostles, but likewise for encreasing the sect and gaining partizans. The poor undoubtedly must have been eager to join a party, where the rich engaged *to lay the cloth* for the indigent. Hence it is easy to perceive how this institution might, without a miracle, strengthen faith, and daily augment the number of the faithful.

Of all the adherents the new-born sect acquired, there was none superior to Saul, afterwards known by the name of St. Paul. The actions and writings ascribed to this apostle, exhibit him as an ambitious,

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active, intrepid, and opiniative man, full of enthusiasm, and capable of inspiring others with it. Engaged at first in the profession of a tent-maker, he afterwards attached himself to the service of Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, and rendered services to the priests in their persecutions against the Christians. There is however reason to believe, that the apostles feeling the utility which a man of Saul's character might be of to the party, profited by some disgust he had taken, in order to draw him over to their sect; he consented, very readily conceiving that by the assistance of his talents, superior to those of his brethren, he might easily succeed in placing himself at the head of a party, to which he knew the means of rendering himself necessary. He pretended therefore that his conversion was the effect of a miracle, and that God himself had called him. He caused himself to be baptised at Damascus, joined the apostles at Jerusalem, was admitted a member of their college, and soon made them acquainted with his talents*. He betook himself to preaching Christ and his resurrection, and laboured in gaining over souls. His vehement zeal hurried him, without fear or hesitation, into quarrels with the priests, always indignant at the conduct of the apostles; but his persecutions rendered him dearer to his party, of which he became from that time the prime mover and soul.

Often maltreated and banished by the Jews, he conjectured that it would be beneficial not to confine himself to them, but that conquests might likewise be made among the heathen. He no doubt knew very well, that mankind resemble each other in all superstitions;

* Acts of the Apostles, c. 9.

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that they are every where equally curious about whatever is marvellous; susceptible of fanaticism, lovers of novelties, and easily deceived.—Paul, therefore, sometimes preached to the Jews, and sometimes, on their refusal, addressed himself to the Gentiles, among whom he succeeded in enlisting a considerable number of recruits.

Jesus, born in the bosom of Judaism, and knowing well the attachment of his fellow-citizens to the law of Moses, had always openly declared, that he was come to "accomplish, and not to destroy it." His first apostles were, like himself, Jews, and frequently shewed much attachment to the rites of their religion. They took it amiss that Paul their brother would not subject the proselytes he made among the Gentiles, to Judaical usages. Filled with views more vast than those entertained by the other apostles, he did not wish to disgust his new converts with inconvenient ceremonies, such as *circumcision* and abstinence from certain meats. The better to attain his ends, he thought it his duty to neglect usages, which he considered as trifles, while his brethren regarded them as most essential*. Paul endeavoured to prevail on them

* The first proselytes which the apostles made among the Jews, as we have elsewhere said, were called Nazarenes or Ebionites, who believed in Jesus without forsaking the law of Moses on that account. Of consequence they regarded St. Paul as an heretic or an apostate. This fact, attested by Origin, Eusebius, and St. Epiphanius, is important in giving us a distinct idea of primitive Christianity, which we see divided into two sects almost as soon as St. Paul had embraced it. In fact, this new apostle very soon separated himself from his brethren to preach a doctrine different from theirs, and openly undermined the Judaism which St. Peter,

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to hear reason: and it was on this occasion he resisted St. Peter, who did not wish that they should relax in articles important in his eyes.

This altercation produced a real schism. Paul left

St. James, and all the other heads of the church persisted in respecting. But as St. Paul had success among the Gentiles, his party prevailed; Judaism was entirely proscribed, and Christianity became quite a new religion, of which Judaism had been only the figure. Thus St. Paul wholly changed the religious system of Christ, who had proposed only to reform Judaism, professed the law of Moses, and declared himself to have come on purpose *to accomplish, and not to abolish it.* The principal apostles followed the conduct of their master, and shewed themselves much attached to the law and usages of their fathers. St. Paul, notwithstanding their protestations, took a different course; he displayed a contempt or indifference for the legal ordinances, to which, we however observe, he, through policy, sometimes subjected himself. Thus we find he circumcised Timothy, and performed Jewish ceremonies in the temple of Jerusalem.

Not content with decrying the law of Moses, St. Paul, by his own confession, preached a gospel of his own. He says positively, in his epistle to the Galatians, chap. i. 11, &c. "That the gospel which I preach is not after men," and that he had received it by a particular revelation of Jesus Christ. He speaks likewise of his quarrels with the other heads of the sect; but his disciple St. Luke passes over these very slightly in the Acts, which are much more the *Acts of Paul* than the Acts of the Apostles. It appears evident, that he embroiled himself with his brethren, the partizans of the circumcision, and founders of the Nazarenes or Ebionites, i. e. reformed Jews converted to Jesus. They had a gospel little conformable to that of Paul, as they combined the law of Christ with that of Moses. St. Irenæus, St. Justin, St. Epiphanius, Eusebius, Theodoret, and St. Augustine, agree in telling us, that these Ebionites, or converted Jews, regarded Jesus as a "mere man, son of Joseph and Mary,

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his brethren to preach the Judaical gospel or circumcision, whilst he preached his own in Asia Minor and in Greece, sometimes to the Hellenistic Jews, whom he found established there, and sometimes to the idolatrous Greeks, whose language, though unknown to the other apostles, Paul was acquainted with. His mission had a success which far surpassed that of his brethren; in so much that we may fairly regard Paul as the true founder of the Christian religion such as it is at this day. If we have recourse to the Acts of the Apostles, we perceive in this new preacher an activity, a warmth, a vehemence, and an enthusiasm well adapted to communicate itself. The missionaries he formed, spread his doctrine to a great distance. The gospel of the apostle of the Gentiles prevailed over the gospel of the Judaizing apostles; and in a short time there were a great number of Christians in all the provinces of the Roman empire.

To a miserable people, crushed by tyrants and oppressors of every kind, the principles of the new sect had powerful attractions. Its maxims, which tended to introduce equality and a community of goods, were calculated to entice persons despised. Its promises flattered miserable fanatics, to whom was announced the end of a perverse world, the approaching arrival of Jesus, and a kingdom wherein abundance and hap-

to whom they gave the name of Son of God, only on account of his virtues." From this it is evident that it was St. Paul who deified Jesus and abolished Judaism. The Paulites, become the strongest, prevailed over the Ebionites, or disciples of the apostles, and treated them as heretics. Hence we see it is the religion of St. Paul, and not that of Jesus Christ, which at present subsists.

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piness would reign. To be admitted there, they merely required of the proselytes "to believe in Jesus Christ, and be baptized." As for the austere maxims of the Christian sect, they were not of a nature to disgust miserables, accustomed from their situation to suffer, and to experience the want of the conveniences of life. Its dogmas, few in the beginning, were readily adopted by ignorant men, fond of wonders, whom their own mythology disposed to receive the fables of Christians:* besides, their own preachers wrought mira-

* All superstitions have resemblances and affinities. The heathens perceived in their religion circumstances conformable to Christianity. They had Sibyls, oracles, and predictions. Their mythology exhibited gods dethroned and replacing one another. There we see gods persecuted, exiled, and put to death; an Osiris killed by Typhon, and raised again from the dead; an Apollo expelled from heaven; an Adonis, &c. We especially find many points of conformity between Esculapius and Jesus Christ. The heathen god was son of Apollo and the maid Boebias; and, like Jesus, performed a great number of miraculous cures. He was punished and thunderstruck by Jupiter, for having raised the dead and restored them to a better life. After his death, he too went and rejoined the god his father.

The fathers of the church themselves have found striking conformities between Jesus and Prometheus, who was called *The wisdom of the father.* He was punished by Jupiter for having saved the human race, who were on the point of being precipitated into Tartarus. Suidas says, that they gave Prometheus a surname, which signifies *he who died for the people.* He was crucified on Caucasus, and Tertullian speaks of crosses found there. His blood produced a plant, which rendered invulnerable. See the treatise of M. de Rondel, intitled *De la superstition* (on superstition), Amsterdam 1686, 18mo. p. 115—118. This author also observes, that

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cles, which did not permit them to doubt those said to have been performed by Jesus. There is, therefore, reason to presume, that different missionaries, in emulation of one another, took care to compose romances, or histories of Christ, wherein they related a great number of prodigies calculated to make their hero be revered, and to interest the veneration of the faithful. In this manner the different collections, known by the name of *Gospels*, seem to have been framed, wherein, along with very simple facts which might have really occurred, we find many relations that appear credible only to enthusiasts and fools. These histories, composed by different hands, on traditions little uniform, and by authors of very different characters, are not much in harmony; hence the want of conformity in the relations of our evangelists, which has been frequently noticed in the course of this work. There was, as we have elsewhere remarked, a vast number

the heathens had some ideas of the Trinity. The same god was styled Jupiter in heaven, Mercury on earth, and Pluto in hell. See p. 106. Mercury is called Hermes in Greece, which signifies *interpreter*; this god and son of Jupiter is often called *the word interpreted*. The mystery of the Trinity is owing to Plato, who of the *goodness*, *wisdom*, and *power* of God, made three *hypostases*, that is, personified these divine attributes. See *Platonisme devoile*, by Souverain, a Socinian, 8vo. 1700, p. 65.

In fact, we know that the heathens admitted a hell or Tartarus, a last judgment, genii, angels, demons; *metamorphoses* or *incarnations*, and a thousand fables, analogous to those of Christians. Several of their philosophers have believed in the end of the world; and that doctrine, according to Lactantius, wonderfully favoured the preachers of the gospel.

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of gospels in the first ages of the church ;* and out of these the council of Nice chose only four, to which they gave the divine sanction.

We shall not here examine whether these gopels really belong to the authors to whom they are ascribed. The opinion which attributes them to their putative writers, might have been founded at first on some tradition, true or false, which existed in the time of the council of Nice, or which the fathers of that council had an interest in sanctioning. We shall only remark, that it is difficult to persuade ourselves, without faith, that the gospel of St. John especially, filled with Platonic notions, could be composed by the son of Zebedee; by a poor fisherman, who, perhaps, incapable of writing, and even reading, could not be acquainted with the philosophy of Plato.†

Whatever opinion may be formed as to this, we find the mystical and marvellous philosophy of Plato introduced very early into Christianity, which agreed in

* See Appendix for a list of these gospels.

† From the infancy of Christianity there have been people, who have denied the authenticity of the gospels. *Marcias* accused them of being filled with falsehoods. The Aloges and Theodotians rejected the gospel according to St. John, which they regarded as a tissue of lies. See Tillimont Memoirs, tome 2. p. 256. St. Epiph. Hæresis. 51. Tillimont. t. 2. p. 438. St. Augustin in his *Confessions*, l. 7. c. 9. says, that he had found in the Platonists the whole beginning of the gospel of St. John. Origen *(contra Celsum)* informs us, that this heathen reproached Christ with having taken from Plato the finest maxims, which the gospel attributes to him, and among others the one which says, that "it is more easy for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to be saved."—i. 6.

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several respects with the tenets held by the followers of that eminent philosopher; while, on the other hand, his perplexed philosophy must also have easily amalgamated with the principles of the Christian sect. This analogy introduced into the religion of Christians the notions of *Spirituality*, *Trinity*, and the *Logos*, or *Word*, besides a multitude of magical and theurgical ceremonies, which, in the hands of the priests of Christianity, have become *mysteries*, or *sacraments*. On reading Porphyry, Jamblichus, and particularly Plotinus, we are surprised to hear them speaking so frequently in the same style as our theologists. These marks of resemblance drew several Platonists over to the faith, who figured among the doctors of the church. Of this number were St. Clement of Alexandria, St. Ireneus, St. Justin Martyr, Origen, &c. Platonism may indeed be regarded as the source of the principal dogmas and mysteries of the Christian religion.*

* Those who doubt the truth of this assertion, have only to read the works of the disciples of Plato, who were all superstitious persons and Theurgists, whose ideas are sufficiently analogous to those of Christians. We find indeed these writings filled with receipts to make the gods and good genii descend, and to drive away the bad, &c. See particularly *Platonisme devoile.* Tertullian reproaches the heretics of his time with having wandered astray in order to introduce Platonism, Stoicism, and Dialectics into Christianity. *Viderint qui Stoicum et Platonicum, et Dialecticum Christianismum protulerunt.* Tertull. de præscription. adv. hæres. c. 3. It was evidently the mixture of the unintelligible doctrine of Plato, with the Dialectics of Aristotle, which rendered theology so senseless, disputable, and fraught with subtilties. The cardinal Pallavicini acknowledges, that " without Aristotle the Christians would have wanted a great number of articles of faith."

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The austere and fanatical lives of Christians must also have favourably disposed a great number of Stoics in behalf of the sect, who were accustomed to make a merit of despising objects desirable to other men, depriving themselves of the comforts of life, and braving affliction and death. We accordingly find a great number of enthusiasts tinctured with these maxims in the Christian religion. This fanatical way of thinking was very necessary to the first Christians, in the midst of the crosses and persecutions which they suffered at first on the part of the Jews, and thereafter on the part of the emperors and grandees, incited by the heathen priests. The latter, according to the custom of the priesthood in all countries, made a very cruel war on a sect who attacked their gods, and menaced their temples with a general desertion. The universe was weary of the impostures and exactions of these priests, their costly sacrifices, and lying oracles. Their knaveries had been frequently unveiled, and the new sect tendered to mankind a worship less expensive, and which, without being addressed so much to the eyes as the worship of idols, was better adapted than the other to set the imagination at work, and excite enthusiasm.

Christianity was moreover flattering and consolatory to the wretched; it placed all men on the same level; humbled the rich, and was announced as destined for the poor through preference. Among the Romans, slaves were in some measure excluded from religion; and it might have been said, that the gods did not concern themselves with the homage of these degraded beings. The poor, besides, had not wherewith to satisfy the rapacity of Pagan priests, who, like ours,

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did nothing without money. Thus slaves and persons in misery must have been strongly attached to a system, according to which all men are equal in the eyes of the Divinity, and that the wretched have better right to the favours of a suffering and contemned God, than persons temporally happy.

The priests of Paganism therefore became uneasy at the rapid progress of the sect. The government was alarmed at the clandestine assemblies which the Christians held. They were believed to be the enemies of the emperors, because they continually refused to offer sacrifices to the gods of the country for their prosperity. Even the people, ever zealous, believed them enemies of their gods, because they would not join in their worship. They treated the Christians as Atheists and impious persons, because they did not conceive what could be the invisible objects of their adoration; and because they took offence at the mysteries, which they saw them celebrating in the greatest secrecy*. The Christians, thus loaded with the public hatred, very soon became its victims; they were

* We may see from the apologies of St. Justin, Tatian, Athenagoras, Tertullian, and Arnobius, that the most abominable crimes were imputed to the first Christians, such as eating little children, being irreligious and sacrilegious, committing incontinences and incest in their nocturnal assemblies. It was pretended that they fastened a dog to a candlestick, and when by means of this the light was extinguished, the sexes coupled promiscuously. These opinions, spread abroad among the people, irritated them against the Christians, whom they regarded as the cause of the wrath of the gods, and of the public calamities. We accordingly see that, even under the mildest emperors, the popular fury kindled persecutions.

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persecuted: and persecution, as it always happens, rendered them more opiniative. Enthusiasm more and more enflamed their souls; they made it a glory to resist the efforts of tyrants; they even went so far as to brave their punishments, and concluded with believing, that the greatest happiness was to perish under their severities. In this they flattered themselves with resembling the Son of God, and were persuaded, that by dying for his cause, they were certain of reigning with him in heaven.

In consequence of these fanatical ideas, so flattering to vanity, martyrdom became an object of ambition to many Christians. Independent of the heavenly rewards, which they believed assured to those who suffered with constancy, and perished for religion, they saw them esteemed, revered, and carefully attended to, during their lives, while honours, almost divine, were decreed them after death. On the contrary, those of the Christian community, who had the weakness to shrink from tortures, and renounce their religion, were scoffed at, despised, and regarded as infamous. So many motives combined, contributed to warm the imaginations of the faithful, already sufficiently agitated by notions of the approaching end of the world, the coming of Jesus, his happy reign, and impressed with the fanatical notions which glut the writings of the Christians. They submitted cheerfully to punishments, and gloried in their chains: they courted martyrdom as a favour, and often, through a blind zeal, provoked the rage of their persecutors. The magistrates by their proscriptions and tortures, caused the enthusiasm of the Christians to kindle more and more. Their courage was besides supported by the

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heads of their sect, who constantly displayed the heavens opening to the heroes who consented to suffer and perish for their cause, which they took care to make the poor fanatics regard as the cause of God himself. A martyr, at all times, is merely the victim of the enthusiastic or knavish priest who has been able to seduce him.*

Men are always disgusted with those who use violence; they conjecture that they are wrong, and that those against whom they commit violence have reason on their side. Persecution will ever make partisans to the cause persecuted: and those to which we allude, tended the more to confirm Christians in their religion. The spectators of their sufferings were interested for them. They were curious to know the principles of a sect which drew on itself such cruel treatment, and infused into its adherents a courage believed to be supernatural. They imagined that such a religion could be the work of a God only; its partisans appeared extraordinary men, and their enthusiasm became contagious. Violence served only to spread it the more, and, according to the language of a Christian doctor, "the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church."

* *Martyr* in Greek signifies *witness*. But, with the exception of the apostles, (whose actions have been transmitted to us only by the forgers of legends), what kind of testimony could men, who had never seen Jesus, bear him, and who could know him only from the stories told them by preachers, who had what they themselves knew of him only by a very suspicious tradition? A martyr is in general only a fool, duped by another fool, who was the dupe of a knave, whose object was to establish a sect, and who himself frequently was punished for his projects!!

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The clergy would fain make the propagation of Christianity pass for an evident miracle of divine omnipotence; while it was owing solely to natural causes, inherent in the human mind, the property of which it is to adhere strenuously to its own way of thinking; harden itself against violence; applaud itself for its pertinacity; admire courage in others; feel an interest for those who display it; and suffer itself to be gained by their enthusiasm. A little reflection will show that the obstinacy of the martyrs, far from being a sign of the divine protection, or of the goodness of their cause, can be regarded only as the effect of blindness, occasioned by the reiterated lessons of their fanatical or deceitful priests.* What conduct more extravagant

* The learned H. Dodwell has written two copious dissertations on the martyrs: the one to prove that they were not so numerous as is commonly imagined; and the other to demonstrate that their constancy can be ascribed only to very natural causes. Dodwell's Dissertationes Cyprianicæ, in 8vo, Oxoniæ, 1684. It cannot be denied, that the frenzy of martyrdom was an epidemical disease among the first Christians, to which their spiritual physicians were obliged to apply remedies, as these wretched beings were guilty of suicide.

Many of the primitive Christians, instead of *flying* as the gospel directs, not only ran voluntarily to execution, but provoked their judges to do them that favor. Under Trajan, all the Christians in a city of Asia came in a body to the proconsul, and offered themselves to the slaughter, which made him cry, "O! ye unhappy people, if ye have a mind to die, have ye not halters and precipices enough to end your lives, but ye must come here for executioners." Tertul. ad Scap. c. 5. p. 11. Fleury's Manners of the Christians, &c. This was a general practice under the Antonini. Marcus Antoninus severely reflected on the obstinacy of the Chris-

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than that of a sovereign, who, able and without effusion of blood to extend his power, should prefer to do it by the massacre of the most faithful of his subjects? Is it not annihilating the divine wisdom and goodness to assert, that a God, to whom every thing is possible, among so many ways which he may have had to establish his religion, will venture upon that of making its dearest friends victims to the fury of its cruellest enemies? Such are the notions which Christianity presents; and it is easy to perceive that they are the necessary consequences of a fundamental absurdity, on which that religion is established. It maintains, that a just God did not wish to chuse any other way to redeem guilty men, than that of making

tians in thus running headlong to death; and St. Cyprian laboured hard to comfort those who were so unhappy as to escape the crown of martyrdom. The enemies of Julian the apostate even admit that the Christians of his time did every thing they could to provoke that emperor to put them to death. Dr. Hickes, a celebrated protestant divine, goes so far as to say that the Christians "were not illegally persecuted by Julian."—See his Answer to Julian, c. ii. &c. After all, it will be found that every violent passion has its martyrs. Pride, vanity, prejudice, love, patriotism, and even vice itself, produces martyrs; or at least a contempt of every kind of danger. Is it then surprising that enthusiasm and fanaticism, the strongest passions of mankind, have so often enabled men, inspired with the hopes they give, to face, and despise death? Besides, if Christians can boast a catalogue of martyrs, Jews can do the same. The unfortunate Jews, condemned to the flames by the inquisition, were martyrs to their religion; and their fortitude proves as much in their favour as that of the Christians can do in favour of Christianity. If martyrs demonstrate the truth of a religion or sect, where are we to look for the true one?—*Boulanger. Volney's Ruins of Empires, &c.*

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his dear innocent son be put to death. According to such principles, it can excite no surprise that so unreasonable a God should wish to convert the heathen, his enemies, by the murder of Christians, his children. Though these absurdities are believed, such as do not possess the holy blindness of faith cannot comprehend why the Son of God, having already shed his blood for the redemption of men, was not a sufficient sacrifice? and why, to effect the conversion of the world, there was still a necessity for the blood of an immense number of martyrs, whose merits must have been undoubtedly much less than those of Jesus? To resolve these difficulties, theologians refer us to the eternal decrees, the wisdom of which we are not permitted to criticise. This is sending us far back indeed; yet notwithstanding the solidity of the answer, the incredulous persist in saying that their limited understandings can neither find justice, nor wisdom, nor goodness, in eternal decrees which could in such a manner effect the salvation of the human race.

Persecutions were not the only means which served to propagate the religion of christians. The preachers, zealous for the salvation of souls, or rather desirous to extend their own power over the minds of men, and strengthen their party, inherited from the Jews the passion of making proselytes*. This passion suited

* The missions have for their particular object to extend the power of the clergy. The church sends enthusiasts or knaves to the extremities of the earth to beat up for subjects. The missionaries there transact their business vastly well, and open to themselves new branches of commerce, while they act with prudence. The insolence and imprudence of the Jesuits have occasioned the proscription of the Christian

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presumptuous fanatics, who were persuaded, that they alone possessed exclusively the divine favour: it was unknown to the heathens, who were accustomed to suffer every one peaceably to adore his gods, providing that his worship did not disturb the public tranquillity.

Prompted by zeal, the Christian missionaries, notwithstanding persecutions and dangers, spread themselves, with an ardour unparalleled, wherever they could penetrate, in order to convert idolaters, and bring back strayed sheep to the fold of Jesus. This activity naturally merited the recompence of very great success Men, whom their idolatrous priests neglected, were flattered with seeing themselves courted, and becoming the object of the disinterested cares of personages, who through pure tenderness for them came from afar, and through the greatest perils, to bring them consolation. In consequence of these dispositions, they listened favourably to them; they showed kindness to men so obliging, and were enchanted with their doctrine and relations. Many adopted their lessons, placed themselves under their guidance, and found

religion in Japan, China, &c. Our missionaries are every where well received in the beginning, and in general suffer martyrdom only when their real designs are discovered. Kambi, emperor of China, asked the Jesuit missionaries at Pekin what they would say if he would send missionaries to their nation? The revolts excited by the Jesuits in Japan and Ethiopia are well known. A holy missionary has been heard to say, that without *muskets*, missionaries could never make proselytes. It remains to be seen whether the proposed missions to Hindostan under the sanction of the British government will find it necessary to employ these *carnal weapons*.

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that their God and dogmas were superior to those which had preceded them.

Thus by degrees and without a miracle, Christianity planted colonies, more or less considerable, in every part of the Roman empire. They were directed, and governed by *inspectors, overseers,* or *bishops,** who, in spite of the dangers with which they were menaced, laboured obstinately, and without intermission, in augmenting the number of their disciples, that is, of slaves devoted to their holy wills. Empire over opinions was always the most unbounded. As nothing has greater power over the minds of the vulgar than religion, Christians every where displayed an unlimited submission to their spiritual sovereigns, on whose laws they persuaded themselves that their eternal happiness depended. Thus our missionaries, converted into bishops, exercised, with consent of their disciples, a spiritual magistracy and sacred jurisdiction which, in the end, placed them not only above other priests, but also made them respected by, and neces-

* Fleury informs us that in the early periods of Christianity "all the clergy, even to the bishops, lived after a poor, at least a plain and ordinary manner." St. Jerome highly disapproved the distinctions of bishops and priests, or curates. He asserted that, according to St. Paul, they were the same thing, "till by the instigation of the devil there were destinations in religion." At this day bishops, who do nothing, enjoy great revenues, while innumerable curates who labour are dying for hunger; and while lazy priests, those blood-suckers of society, thus wallow in an abundance shameful to the states by whom they are tolerated, the man of talents, the man of science, and the brave soldier are suffered to languish in indigence, and scarcely exist on the mere necessaries of life.

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sary to, the temporal power. Princes have always employed religion and its ministers with success in crushing the people, and keeping them under the yoke. Impostures and delusions are of no use to sovereigns who *govern*, but they are very useful to those who *tyrannize*.*

* See Appendix, No. III.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

ACCOUNT OF CHRISTIANITY FROM CONSTANTINE TO THE PRESENT TIME.

AT the end of the three centuries, we find Christianity, advanced by all those means, become a formidable party in the Roman empire. The sovereign power acknowledged the impossibility of stifling it; and Christians, scattered in great numbers through all the provinces, formed an imposing combination.* Ambitious chiefs incessantly wrested from one another the right of reigning over the wrecks of an enslaved republic: each sought to increase his own strength, and acquire an advantage over his rivals. It was in these circumstances that Constantine, to strengthen himself first against Maxentius, and thereafter against Licinius, thought it his interest, by a stroke of policy, to draw over all the Christians to his party. For this purpose he openly favoured them, and thereby reinforced his army with all the soldiers of that numerous sect. In gratitude for the advantages they procured him, he concluded with embracing their religion, now

* We are, said Tertullian, but of yesterday, and yet the world is filled with us — your cities, your houses, your garrisons, your villages, your colonies, your very camps, your tribes, your palaces, your senate, your courts of justice.— Apol. c. 27.

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become so powerful. He honoured, distinguished and enriched the Christian bishops, well assured of attaching them to himself by his liberality to their pastors, and the favour he shewed them. Aided by their succours, he flattered himself with the disposal of the flock.*

By this political revolution, so favourable to the clergy, the bashful chiefs of the Christians, who hitherto had reigned only in secret and without eclat, sprung out of the dust, and became men of importance. Seconded by a very despotical emperor, whose interests were linked with theirs, they very soon employed their credit to avenge their injuries, and return to their enemies, with usury, the evils which they had received. The unexpected change in the fortune of the Christians made them soon forget the mild and tolerating maxims of their legislator. They conceived, that these maxims, made for wretches destitute of power, could no longer suit men supported by sovereigns; they attacked the temples and gods of paganism; their worshippers were excluded from places of trust, and the master lavished his favours on those only who consented to think like him, and justify his change by imitating it.† Thus, without any miracle,

* It is evident that Constantine, notwithstanding the eulogiums the Christians have bestowed on him, was an abominable prince, stained with the murder of his wife, his son, and his colleague. He sought in vain for expiation in the heathen religion, but found it only in the Christian. If he was really a Christian, his example will serve, like many others, to prove, that a person may be at once very devout and very wicked.

† It is well established, that Constantine, his children,

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the court became Christian, or at least feigned to be so, and the descendants of hypocritical courtiers were Christians in reality.*

Even before the time of Constantine, Christianity had been rent by disputes, heresies, schisms, and animosities between the Christian chiefs.† The adherents of the different doctors had reviled, anathematised, and maltreated each other without their quarrels making a noise in the world. The subtilties of Grecian metaphysics, introduced into the Christian religion, had hatched an infinity of disputes, which had not hitherto been attended with any remarkable consequences. All these quarrels burst forth in the reign of Constantine. The bishops and champions of different parties caballed to draw over the emperor to their side, and thus aid them in crushing their adversaries. At the same time a very considerable party of Christians, under the banner of the priest *Arius*,

and especially Theodosius, used unheard-of violences in order to annihilate paganism. To be convinced of this, we have only to read the Theodosian code, xvi. tit. x. *de Paganis, Sacrificiis, et Templis.*

* 'Tis true, says Fleury, the barbarians were converted; the Francs turned Christians; and the Goths and Lombards became good Catholics; but they remained barbarians still.

† St. Epiphany, who wrote in the fourth century of the Christian æra, informs us, that in his time there were already *fourscore heresies* or sects, into which Christians were divided. St. Irenæus, who lived in the second century, had, before him, already refuted a great number. Since then, we have beheld heresies multiplying in the church without end; but this is not surprising:—in works so contradictory, so obscure, and so absurd, as those of which the Bible is composed, every one may find whatever he is in want of to prop up systems the most opposite and extravagant.

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denied the divinity of Jesus. Too little versed in the principles of the religion that party had embraced, but wishing to decide the question, the emperor referred it to the judgment of the bishops. He convened them in the city of Nice, and the plurality of suffrages regulated definitively the symbol of faith. Jesus became a God *consubstantial* with his Father; the Holy Ghost was likewise a God *proceeding* from the two others; finally, these three Gods combined, made only one God.

Tumultuous clamours made this unintelligible decision pass, and converted it into a sacred dogma, notwithstanding the reclamations of opponents, who were silenced by treating them as blasphemers and heretics. The priests who had the strongest lungs, declared themselves *orthodox*. The emperor, little acquainted with the ground of the quarrel, ranged himself for the time on their side, and quitted it afterwards, according as he thought proper to lend an ear sometimes to the bishops of one party, and sometimes to those of another. The history of the church informs us, that Constantine, whom we here see adhering to the decision of the council of Nice, made the orthodox and the heretics alternately experience his severities.

Nevertheless, after many years, and even ages of disputes, the bishops of Christendom have agreed in regarding Jesus as a true God. They felt in the end that it was important for them to have a God for their founder—a tenet which could not fail to render their own authority more respected. They maintained, that this authority was derived from the apostles, who held theirs directly from Christ, that is, from God himself. It would now-a-days be criminal to doubt the truth of

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this opinion, though many Christians are not yet convinced of it, and venture to appeal to the decision of the universal church.*

The bishops assembled at Nice, decided also, as we have elsewhere related, on the authenticity of the gospels and books ordained to serve for a rule to Christians. It is then to these doctors, as has been already remarked, that Christians owe their faith, which however was afterwards frequently shaken by disputes, heresies, and wars, and even by assemblies of bishops, who often annulled what other assemblies of bishops had decreed in the most solemn manner. To reckon from Constantine to our time, the interest of the heads of the church dictated every decree, and formed the rule, by which dogmas were established, often wholly unknown to the founders of their religion. The universe became the arena of the passions, disputes, intrigues, and cruelties of these holy gladiators, who

* Except the English, all Protestant Christians reject *Episcopacy*, and regard it as an usurped power. Among the Catholics, the Jansenists think the same, which is the true cause of the enmity the Pope and bishops display against them. It appears St. Jerome was, on this point, of the opinion of the Jansenists. Yet we see St. Paul at first much occupied in advancing the Episcopal dignity. St. Ignatius of Antioch, disciple of the apostles, insinuates in his epistles, the high opinion which the Christians ought to have of a bishop; and the very antient author of the Apostolic Constitutions, l. 1. c. 2, openly declares, that *a bishop is a god on earth, destined to rule over all men, priests, kings, and magistrates.* Though these *Constitutions* are reputed Apocryphal, the bishops have conformed their conduct to them more than to the canonical gospel, wherein Jesus, far from assigning prerogatives to bishops, declares, that in his kingdom there will be *neither first nor last.*

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treated each other with the utmost barbarity. Temporal sovereigns, united in interest with spiritual chiefs, or blinded by them, thought themselves at all times obliged to partake of their fury. Princes seemed to hold the sword for the sole purpose of cutting the throats of victims pointed out by the priests, who influenced their minds. These blinded princes believed they served God, or laboured for the welfare of their kingdoms, by espousing all the passions of the priests, who were become the most arrogant, the most vindictive, the most covetous, and the most flagitious of men.*

We shall not enter into a detail of all the quarrels which the Christian religion has produced.† We shall merely observe, that they were continual, and have been frequently attended with consequences so deplorable, that nations have had reason more than a hundred times every century, to regret the peaceful paganism, and tolerating idolatry of their ancestors. The gospel, or *the glad tidings*, constantly gave the signal for the commission of crimes. THE CROSS WAS THE BANNER UNDER WHICH MADMEN ASSEMBLED TO GLUT THE EARTH WITH BLOOD. The will of Heaven was understood by nobody; and the clergy disputed without end on the manner of explaining oracles, which the Deity had himself come to reveal to mortals. It was

* See Appendix IV.

† Their disputes were *endless*, and from disputing they often fell into quarrels and seditions. The clergy and monks who were the most zealous, broke forth into the greatest heats, and when the monks, above all others, espoused the quarrel, there were no methods too lawless or violent for them. *Fleury.*

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always indispensable to take a side in the most unintelligible quarrels: neutrality was regarded as impiety. The party for which the prince declared, was always *orthodox*, and on that account believed it had a right to exterminate all others; the orthodox in the church were those who had the power to exile, imprison, and destroy their adversaries.*

The bishops, whom the puissance of an emperor had raised from the dust, soon became rebellious subjects; and, under pretence of maintaining their spiritual power, laboured to be independent of the sovereign, and even the laws of society. They maintained that princes themselves, being subjects of Christ, ought to be subjected to the jurisdiction of his representatives on earth. Thus the pretended successors of some fishermen of Judea, to whom Constantine had stretched forth his hand, arrogated to themselves the right of reigning over kings; and in this way the kingdom of heaven served to conquer the kingdoms of the earth.

Hitherto the Christian sect, spread throughout the empire, had been governed by bishops or chiefs independent of each other, and perfectly equal as to jurisdiction. This made the church an aristocratical republic; but its government soon became monarchial, and even despotical. The respect which was always

* Lucifer Calaritanus, then a most orthodox bishop, in several discourses addressed to the son of Constantine, did not scruple to tell the emperor himself that it was the duty of the orthodox to kill Constantius on account of his Arianism, which he called Idolatry; and for this he quoted Deut. xiii. 6. and 1 Maccab. i. 43, to v. 29 of c. ii. See Johnson's Answer to Hick's Constant. p. 56, &c.

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entertained for Rome, the capital of the world, seemed to give a kind of superiority to the bishop or spiritual head of the Christians established there.* His brethren, therefore, frequently shewed a deference to him, and occasionally consulted him. Nothing more was wanting to the ambition of the bishops of Rome, or to advance the right they arrogated of judging their brethren, and incite them to declare themselves the monarchs of the Christian church. A very apocryphal tradition had made St. Peter travel to Rome, and had also made this chief of the apostles establish his see in that city. The Roman bishop therefore pretended to have succeeded to the rights of Simon Peter, to whom Jesus in the gospel had entrusted more particularly the care of feeding his sheep. He accordingly assumed the pompous title of successor of St. Peter, universal bishop, and vicar of Jesus Christ.† It is

* Several authors have denied, and with much reason, that St. Peter ever set a foot in Rome. In the Acts of the Apostles no mention is made of this journey, unless we suppose that Luke has omitted to speak of St. Peter, who was a Nazarine or Ebionite, for the purpose of attributing to St. Paul his master the conversion of the capital. See what has been said before of the squabbles of St. Paul with the Judaising apostles. If St. Peter had been at Rome, his gospel would have been forced to yield to that of the apostle of the gentiles, more accommodating to the heathens, as it dispensed with circumcision. It may therefore be presumed that St. Paul was the first pope.—Hist. des Papes, tome 1. Lettres et Monumens des Peres Apostoliques, par Abraham Ruchat, in 8vo, Leyde, 1738. Fr. Spanheim filii dessertat. iv. Ludg. Batav. 1679.

† Besides, it was at Rome the most opulent Christians resided. The Romish church gave large charities to the

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true, these titles were often contested with him by the oriental bishops, too proud to bow willingly under the yoke of their brother; but by degrees, through dint of artifices, intrigues, and frequently violences, those who enjoyed the see of Rome, ever prosecuting their project with ardour, succeeded in getting themselves acknowledged in the west as the heads of the Christian church;*

Pliant and submissive at first to sovereigns, whose power they dreaded, they soon mounted on their shoulders; and trampled them under their feet, when they saw themselves certain of their power over the minds of devotees, rendered frantic by superstition. Then indeed they threw off the mask, gave to nations the signal of revolt, incited Christians to their mutual destruction, and precipitated kings from their thrones. To support their pride, they shed oceans of blood; they made weak princes the vile sport of their passion, sometimes their victims and sometimes their executioners. Sovereigns, become their vassals, executed with fear and trembling the decrees Heaven pronounced against the enemies of the holy see, which had created itself the arbiter of faith. In fact, these

faithful in the provinces; its bishop was the richest, and even in the time of the pagans, the Roman see was the object of ambition and contests of the priests, who wrangled among themselves for the flock of Jesus.

* To such a pitch of grandeur had the clerical character reached about this period, that "the emperor Maximus caused St. Martin with one of his priests to eat at the same table with him, and the empress his wife served them with her own hands."—*Fleury*, p. 293.

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inhuman pontiffs immolated to their God a thousand times more human victims than paganism had sacrificed to all its divinities.

After having succeeded in subduing the bishops, the head of the church, with a view to establish and preserve his empire over the people, inundated the states of the princes attached to the sect, with a multitude of subaltern priests and monks, who acted as his spies, his emissaries, and the organs which he employed in making known his will at a distance, and serving his ambition. Thus nations were deluged with men useless or dangerous. Some, under pretext of attaining Christian perfection, astonished the vulgar with a kind of frantic life, denied themselves the common pleasures of existence, renounced the world, and languished in the recesses of a cloister, awaiting the death which their disagreeable life must have rendered desirable. They imagined to please God by occupying themseles solely with prayers, sterile and extravagant meditations, and rendering themselves the victims of a destructive fanaticism. These fools, whom Christianity esteems, may be considered as the victims and martyrs of the higher clergy, who take care never to imitate them.*

* Christianity condemns suicide; yet we admire, as models of perfection, and as personages endowed with supernatural grace, men and women, who, by penitence and senseless austerities, evidently abridge their days. It is asserted, that the religious of La Trappe ended their lives in a few years, dying of phthysis. Is it then more criminal in one to kill himself at once, than to labour ten years at his own destruction? If mankind were more consistent, they would perceive, that it is very ridiculous to condemn a suicide, and

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Few people, however, felt themselves inclined to aspire to this sublime perfection. Most of the monks, more indulgent to themselves, were content with renouncing the world, vegetating in solitude, languishing in an abundant sloth, and living in absolute idleness, at the expence of nations who toil. If some among them were devoted to study, they employed themselves only with the vain subtilties of an unintelligible theology, calculated to incite disturbances in society, and foment discord. Others more active spread themselves over the globe: and, under pretence of preaching the gospel, preached up themselves, the interests of the clergy, and especially the submission due to the Roman pontiff, who was always their true sovereign. These emissaries indeed never had any other country than the church, any other master than its head, or any other interest than that of disturbing the state, in order to advance *the divine rights* of the clergy. Faithful in following the example of Jesus, they brought *the sword*, sowed discord, and kindled wars, seditions, persecutions, and crusades. They sounded the tocsin of revolt against princes who were disagreeable or rebellious to the haughty tyrant of the church; they frequently employed the sacrificing knife of fanaticism, and plunged it in the hearts of kings; and, to make the *cause of God* prosper, they justified the most horrible crimes, and threw the whole earth into consternation.

Such, especially in latter times, were the maxims and conduct of an order of monks, who, pretending

drag his carcase into the street, while they regard a frantic monk, or an enthusiastic wench, as saints agreeable to God.

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to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, assumed the nameof his *Society*. Solely and blindly devoted to the interests of the Roman pontiff, they seemed to have come into the world for the purpose of bringing the universe under his chains. They corrupted the youth, the education of whom they wished exclusively to engross; they strove to restore barbarism, knowing well that want of knowledge is the greatest prop of superstition; they extolled ignorance and blind submission; they depraved the manners, and in their stead substituted vain usages and superstitions, compatible with every vice, and calculated to suppress the remorse which crime might produce. They preached up slavery and unbounded submission to princes, who themselves were their slaves, and who consented to become the instruments of their vengeance. They preached rebellion and regicide against the princes who refused to bend under the odious yoke of the successor of St. Peter, whom they had the effrontery to declare *infallible*, and whose decisions they preferred far above those of the universal church. By their assistance the pope became not only the despot, but even the true God of the Christians.

There were persons, however, who ventured to protest against the violences, extortions, and usurpations of this spiritual tyrant. There were sovereigns, who, to defend their own rights, ventured to struggle with him; but, in times of ignorance, the contest was always unequal between the temporal and spiritual power of opinion. At last, preachers, discontented with the Roman pontiff, opened the eyes of many; they preached *reformation*, and destroyed some abuses and dogmas which appeared to them the most disgusting. Some princes seized this opportunity to

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break the chains wherewith they had been so long oppressed. Without renouncing Christianity, which they always regarded as a religion wholly divine, they renounced Romish Christianity, which they considered as a superstition corrupted through the avarice, interest, and passions of the clergy. Content with lopping off in this manner some branches of a poisoned tree, which its bitter fruits should have discovered, our *reformers* did not perceive, that even the principles of a religion, founded on fanaticism and imposture, must of necessity always produce fanatics and knaves. They did not observe, that an exclusive religion, which pretends to enjoy alone the approbation of the Most High, must be from its essence arrogant and proud, and become at last tyrannical, intolerant, and sanguinary. They did not perceive, that the mania of proselytism, the pretended zeal for the salvation of souls, and passion of the priests for dominion over consciences, must, sooner or later, create devastation. Christianity *reformed*, pretending to resemble the pure Christianity of the first days of the church, produced fiery preachers, persons illuminated, and public incendiaries, who, under pretence of *establishing the kingdom of Christ*, excited troubles, massacres, revolts, and endless disorders. Christian princes of every sect, thought themselves obliged to support the decisions of their doctors. They regarded as infallible, opinions which they themselves had adopted; they enforced them by fire and sword; and were every where in confederacy with their priests to make war on all who did not think like them.*

* The protestants have persecuted, as well as the Romish clergy. Calvin caused Servetus to be burnt at Geneva, while

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We see, especially, the intolerant and persecuting spirit reigning in countries which continue subject to the Roman pontiff. It was there, that priests, nurtured in the maxims of a spiritual despotism, dared with most insolence to tyrannize over minds. They had the effrontery to maintain, that the prince could not, without impiety, dispense with entering into their quarrels, sharing their frenzy, and shedding the blood of their enemies. Contrary to the express orders of Christ, the emissaries of the vicar of Jesus preached openly in his name persecution, revenge, hatred, and massacre.* Their clamours imposed on sovereigns; and the least credulous trembled at sight of their power, which they dared not curb. A superstitious and cowardly policy made them believe, that it was the interest of the throne to unite itself for ever with these inhuman and boisterous madmen. Thus princes, submissive to the clergy, and making common cause with them, became the ministers of their vengeance, and the executors of their will. These blind princes were obliged to support a power the rival of their own, but they did not perceive, that they injured their own authority by de-

they burned Calvinists at Paris. The Anabaptists committed unheard-of excesses in Germany. The English liturgy made Charles I. lose his head, who wanted to introduce it into Scotland. In Holland the Gomarists warmly persecuted the Arminians.

* The gospel contradicts itself incessantly: It blows hot and cold on the article of toleration, which is very convenient for theologians, whatever side they take. When their party is the weakest, they rest on passages which recommend mildness; but so soon as that party get the upperhand, they are then authorised by other passages to crush their adversaries.

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livering up their subjects to the tyranny and extortions of a swarm of men, whose interest it was to plunge them into ignorance, incite their fanaticism, make themselves masters of their minds, domineer over their consciences, and, in short, make them fit instruments to serve their pride, avarice, revenge, and obstinacy. By this worthless policy, in the states most submissive to the spiritual dominion of the Roman pontiff, the liberty of thinking was proscribed with fury, activity was repressed, science was punished, and industry crushed by the rapacity of the clergy, while morals were neglected, and their place supplied by traditional observances. Nations vegetated in inactivity; men cultivated only monastic virtues, grievous to themselves, and useless to society.* They had no other impulse than what their fanaticism afforded, and no other science than an obscure jargon of theology. Their understandings had no other employment than endless disputes on mysterious subtilties, unworthy of rational beings. Those futile occupations engrossed the attention of the most profound genius, whose labours would have been useful, if they had been directed to objects really interesting.

Nations were impoverished to foster, in abundance,

* The learned Abbé Fleury agrees as to these facts, in his *Mœurs des Chretiens*, partie 5. § 54. where he says, that *Christians ought to observe exactly what is practised in the most orderly monasteries, to become living examples of Christian morality.* Thus, by this confession, a good Christian is a true monk: now a monk is a citizen dead to society. What would become of a country where every body should pretend to Christian perfection, and to attain which was their only aim? There would be neither merchants, nor soldiers, nor married persons.

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in luxury, and often in drunkenness, legions of monks, priests, and pontiffs, from whom they derived no real benefits. Under pretence of bestowing stipends on the intercessors with God, they richly endowed a multitude of drones, whose prayers and reveries procured only misery and dissensions. Education, entrusted throughout Christendom to base or ignorant priests, was calculated to form superstitious persons only, destitute of the qualities necessary to make useful citizens. The instruction they gave Christians, was confined to inculcating dogmas and mysteries which the latter never could comprehend. They incessantly preached up evangelical morality; but that sublime morality which all the world esteems, and which so few practice, because it is incompatible with the nature and wants of man, did not restrain the passions, or ever check their irregularity of manners. When that Stoical morality was practised, it was only by some imbecile fanatics or fiery enthusiasts, whom the ardour of their zeal rendered dangerous to society. The saints of Christianity were either the most useless or most flagitious of men.

Princes, the great, the rich, and even the heads of the church, thought themselves excused from the rigorous and literal practice of precepts and counsels, which a God himself had come on purpose to communicate. They left Christian perfection to some miserable monks, for whom alone it seemed originally destined. Complaisant guides smoothed for others the roads to Paradise, and, without bridling the passions, persuaded their votaries that it was sufficient to come at stated times *to confess* their faults to them, humble themselves at their feet, undergo the penances and cc-

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remonies which they should impose, and especially make donations to the church, in order to obtain from God remission of the outrages they committed on his creatures. By these means, in most Christian countries, people and princes openly united devotion with the most hideous depravity of manners, and often with the blackest crimes. There were devout tyrants and adulterers, oppressors and iniquitous ministers, courtiers without morals, and public depredators all very devout. There were knaves of every kind displaying the greatest zeal for a religion, the ministers of which imposed easy expiations even on those who violated its most express precepts*.

Thus, by the cares of the spiritual guides of Christianity, concord was banished from states; princes sunk into bondage; the people were blinded; science was stifled; nations were impoverished; true morality was unknown; and the most devout Christians were commonly devoid of those talents and virtues which are indispensably necessary for the support of society.

* It is asserted, and repeated every day, that religion is necessary, and that it is a *check*. It is necessary only to open our eyes to be convinced, that religion among high and low, restrains nobody, not even the priests who preach and live by it. The most devout nations of Europe, such as the Italians, Portuguese, and Spaniards, are alike distinguished by their bigotry and corruption of manners; the clergy themselves shew them the example of perfidy, cruelty, and the most unbridled licentiousness. To restrain men, there is need neither of falsehoods nor fables; but of good laws, good education, cultivated reason, talents, science, good examples, rewards, and equitable punishments. As chimeras only are opposed to the irregularities of mankind, they are not capable of vanquishing their inclinations.

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Such are the immense advantages which the religion of Christ has procured to the world! Such are the effects we see resulting from the gospel, or the *glad tidings*, which the Son of God came in person to announce! To judge of it *by its fruits*, that is, according to the rule which the Messiah himself has given, the incredulous find, that Christianity was allegorically represented by the *fig tree accursed*. But those who have faith, assure us, that in the other world this tree will some day produce delicious fruits. We must therefore wait for them in patience, for every thing evinces that the great benefits promised by this religion are very little perceptible in the present world.

There are, however, people who carry incredulity so far as to think, that if there exists a God really jealous of his rights, he will confer little recompence on mortals so impious as to associate with him a man, a Jew, and a charlatan; and to pay him honours which are due only to the Divinity. Indeed, in supposing that God is offended by the actions of his creatures, and concerns himself with their behaviour, he must be irritated at the odious conduct of many Christians, who, under pretence of devotion and zeal, believe themselves permitted to violate the most sacred duties of nature, of which they make the Deity the author.

It is, add our unbelievers, very difficult to calculate the duration of human extravagancies; but they flatter themselves, that the reign of falsehood and error will terminate at some period, and give place to reason and truth*. They hope, that nations and their chiefs

* A Scotchman published at London, 1699, a book under the title of *Joh. Craigii Scoti, theologiæ Christianæ principia mathematica*, wherein he endeavours to prove, that every thing founded on the testimony of men, whether inspired or

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will some day perceive the danger resulting from their prejudices; that they will blush at having prostituted their praises on objects deserving sovereign contempt; that they will regret the blood and treasures which baneful fables and reveries have cost them; and that they will be at last ashamed of having been the dupes and victims of a mass of romances, destitute of probability, and never possessing a more solid foundation than the astonishing credulity of men, and the astonishing impudence of those who preach them. These unbelievers venture at least to glimpse at a time, when men, become more sensible of their own interest, will acknowledge the truly barbarous folly of hating and tormenting themselves, and cutting one another's throats for obscure dogmas, puerile opinions and ceremonies unworthy of rational beings, and on which it is impossible to be ever unanimous. These infidels push-

not inspired, is only probable, and that its probability diminishes in proportion as mankind recede from the time the witnesses lived, on whose testimony they believe. On this principle he makes an algebraical calculation, according to which he affirms, that it is probable the Christian religion will endure still 1454 years, at the end of which its probability of endurance will be reduced to nothing. But he supposes, that the last judgment must arrive in time to prevent this total eclipse of the faith. Whether these calculations and conjectures be true or false, we may apply to the religion of Jesus what Lactantius said of the heathen mythology, according to which Jupiter had dethroned his father Saturn: *Video alium Deum fuisse regem primis temporibus, alium consequentibus. Potest ergo fieri, ut alius fit postea futurus. Si enim regnum prius mutatum est; cur desperemus etiam posterius posse mutari?* Lactant. Institut. Divin. lib. i. c. 11. If God was weary of the Jewish religion, why may he not become weary of the Christian also?

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their temerity so far as to maintain, that it is very possible sovereigns and subjects may one day loathe a religion burdensome to the people, and producing real advantages only to the priests of a beggarly and crucified God. They think, that the profane laity, if undeceived, could easily bring their priests back to the frugal life of the apostles or of Christ, whom they ought to regard as a model; at least, these infidels imagine, that the ministers of the God of peace would be obliged to live more peaceably, and follow some occupation more honest than that of deceiving, or tearing to pieces, the society which fosters them.

If it is demanded of us what can be substituted for a religion which at all times produced only effects pernicious to the happiness of the human race, we will bid men *cultivate their reason*, which much better than absurd and deceptive systems, will advance their welfare, and make them sensible of the value of virtue. Finally, we will tell them with Tertullian—WHY PAIN YOURSELVES IN SEEKING FOR A DIVINE LAW, WHILST YOU HAVE THAT WHICH IS COMMON TO MANKIND AND ENGRAVEN ON THE TABLETS OF NATURE.*

* Tertull. de corona militis.

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APPENDIX.

I.

THE CHRISTIAN MYTHOLOGY.

GOD, by an inconceivable act of his omnipotence, created the universe out of nothing.* He made the earth for the residence of man, whom he created in his own image. Scarcely had this man, the prime object of the labours of the Almighty, seen the light, when his creator set a snare for him, into which God undoubtedly knew that he *must* fall. A serpent, which speaks, seduces a woman, who is no way surprised at this phenomenon. Being persuaded by the serpent, she solicits her husband to eat of a fruit forbidden by God himself. Adam, the father of the human race, by this light fault draws upon himself and his innocent posterity innumerable evils, which are followed but not terminated by death. By the offence of only one man, the whole human race incurs the wrath of God; and they are at length punished for involuntary faults with an universal deluge. God repents having peopled the earth, and he finds it easier to

* *Ex nihilo nihil fit*, was considered as an axiom by ancient philosophers. The creation, as admitted by Christians of the present day, *i. e.* the *eduction of all things from nothing*, is a theological invention not indeed of very remote date. The word *Barah*, which is used in Genesis, signifies to *compose, arrange*, to *dispose matter already existing*.

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drown and destroy the human race, than to change their hearts.

A small number of the just, however, escaped this destructive flood; but the deluged earth, and the destruction of mankind, did not satiate the implacable vengeance of their Creator: a new generation appeared. These, though descended from the friends of God, whom he had preserved in the general shipwreck of the world, incense him by new crimes. The Almighty is represented as having been incapable of rendering his creatures such as he desired them: a new torrent of corruption carries away mankind, and wrath is again excited in the bosom of Jehovah!

Partial in his affections and preferences, God, at length, casts his eyes on an *idolatrous* Assyrian.* He enters into an alliance with this man, and covenants that his posterity shall be multiplied to the number of the stars of Heaven, or the sands of the sea, and that they shall for ever enjoy the favour of God. To this chosen race he reveals his will: for them, regardless of his justice, he destroys whole nations, Nevertheless this favoured race is not the more happy, or more attached to their God. They fly to strange gods, from whom they seek succours which are denied to them by their own. They frequently insult the God who is able to exterminate them. Sometimes he punished, sometimes consoles them; at one period he hates them without a cause; and at

* The Arabians believe that Abraham, soon after he was born, was hid by his father in a certain cave under a mountain, for fear of the Chaldeans, who sought to lay hands on him, because the astrologers had foretold that he would prove the destruction of their gods. In process of time, Abraham, when he was grown to years of maturity, one evening came out of the cave, and began with great admiration to contemplate the Heavens, with their innumerable stars, and, by chance, seeing the planet Venus arise, which greatly exceeds the rest in beauty and brightness, he said, "This is my God and my Creator." But a little after, when the moon appeared, he changed his opinion, and said, "This is my God and my Creator." At length when the sun arose, being astonished, he cried out, "This is really my God and my Creator, than whom nothing can be imagined more splendid, lofty or beautiful." But when he had spoken these words, the angel Gabriel appeared and stood before him, and taught him the true God and the true religion. Abr. Ecc. Hist. Arab. c. vi.

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another he caresses them with as little reason. At last, finding it impossible to reclaim this perverse people, for whom he continues to feel the warmest tenderness, he sends amongst them his own son. To this son they will not listen, What do I say?—this beloved son, equal to God his father, is put to an ignominious death by his favourite nation! His father at the same time finds it impossible to save the human race without the sacrifice of his own son. Thus an innocent God becomes the victim of a just God, by whom he is beloved: both consent to this strange sacrifice judged necessary by a God who knows that it will be useless to an hardened nation which nothing can reclaim.

We should expect that the death of this God, being useless to Israel, must serve at least to expiate the sins of the rest of the human race. Notwithstanding the eternal alliance with the Hebrews, solemnly sworn to by the Most High, and so many times renewed, that favourite nation find themselves at last deserted by their God who could not reduce them to obedience. The merits of the sufferings and death of his son, are applied to the nations before excluded from his bounty. These are reconciled to Heaven, now become more just in regard to them, and return to grace. Yet in spite of all the efforts of God, his favours are lavished in vain: mankind continue to sin, to enkindle the divine wrath, and to render themselves worthy of the eternal punishment previously prepared and destined for the greater part of the human race.

Such is the faithful history of the God on whom the foundation of the Christian religion is laid. His conduct being so strange, cruel and opposite to all reason, is it surprising to see the worshippers of this God ignorant of their duties, destitute of humanity and justice, and striving to assimilate themselves to the model of that barbarous divinity which they adore? What indulgence have mankind a right to expect from a God who spared not even his own son? What indulgence can the Christian who believes this fable shew to his fellow man. Ought he not to imagine that the surest means of pleasing his God, is to imitate his ferocity and cruelty?

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But this God is not always unjust and cruel; his conduct varies. Sometimes he appears to have created all nature for man alone; at others he seems to have created man only as an object whereon to exercise his arbitrary rage. Sometimes they are cherished by him, notwithstanding all their faults: at others the whole species is condemned to eternal misery for an apple.—This *unchangeable* God is alternately agitated by anger and love, revenge and pity, benevolence and fury. His conduct is continually destitute of that uniformity which characterises wisdom. Partial in his affections, he makes it the duty of his favourite people deliberately to commit the most atrocious crimes. He commands them to violate good faith and contemn the rights of nations: he enjoins upon them the commission of robbery and murder. On other occasions we see him forbidding the same crimes, ordaining justice, and prescribing to mankind abstinence from whatever disturbs the good order of society. This God, who in turn is styled the God of *Vengeance*, the God of *Mercies*, the God of *Arms*, and the God of *Peace*, is constantly at variance with himself. His subjects are consequently each for himself, at liberty to imitate that part of his conduct which he finds most congenial to his humour. Hence their morality becomes arbitrary, which renders it no way surprising that they have never yet been able to agree among themselves, whether it would be most pleasing to their God to tolerate the various opinions of mankind, or to exterminate all who differ from themselves? It is in fact a problem with most Christians, whether it would be more expedient to persecute and assassinate those who think not as they do, or to treat them with humanity and suffer them to live in peace?

Christianity Unveiled, by Boulanger, Chap. iv.

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II.

CHRISTIAN MORALITY.

WERE we to believe Christians, there could have been no true morality on earth until the coming of the founder of their sect. They represent the world as having been plunged in darkness and vice at all times and places where Christ was unknown. Yet morality was always necessary to mankind; for, without it, no society can exist. We find, that before the time of Christ, there were flourishing and virtuous nations, and enlightened philosophers, who continually reminded mankind of their duties. The precepts of Socrates, Confucius, and the Gymnosophists of India, are by no means inferior to those of the Messiah of the Christians.* We find amongst heathens, innumerable instances of equity, humanity, temperance, disinterestedness, patience, and meekness, which flatly contradict the pretensions of the Christians, and prove, that before Christ

* The purest part of the system of morals taught in the New Testament, and which is so much boasted of by Christians, appears to be nothing more than a literal copy of the *Morals of Confucius*, who wrote near 600 years before the birth of Christ. This will appear evident from the following extracts:

"Do to another what you would they should do unto you; and do not unto another what you would should not be done unto you: thou only needest this law alone; it is the foundation and principle of all the rest." 24th Moral.

"Desire not the death of thine enemy; thou wouldst desire it in vain: his life is in the hands of Heaven." 51st Moral.

"Acknowledge thy benefits by the return of other benefits, but never revenge injuries." 53rd Moral.

"We may have an aversion for an enemy without desiring revenge. The motions of nature are not always criminal." 63rd Moral.

Confucius instructed as well by his example as by his precepts; and it would be well if his morals were taught in all the schools and colleges of Europe, instead of those christian creeds and dogmas which the student can never comprehend.

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was known on earth, virtues flourished which were far more real than those he came to teach.

Was a supernatural revelation necessary to inform mankind that society cannot exist without virtue, and that, by the admission of vice, societies consent to their own destruction? Was it necessary that a God should speak, to shew, that they have need of mutual aid and mutual love? Was assistance from on High necessary to discover that revenge is an evil, and an outrage upon the laws, which, when they are just, assume to themselves the right of retribution? Is not the forgiveness of injuries connected with this principle? And is not hatred eternalized, where implacable revenge is exercised? Is not the pardoning of our enemies a greatness of soul, which gives us an advantage over those who offend us? When we do good to our enemies, does it not give us a superiority over them? Is not such conduct calculated to multiply our friends? Does not every man, who is desirous to live, perceive that vice, intemperance, and voluptuousness must shorten the period of life? Has not experience demonstrated to every thinking being, that vice is injurious and detestable even to those who are not free from its empire, and that the practice of virtue is the only means of acquiring real esteem and love? However little mankind may reflect on what they themselves, their true interests, and the ends of society are, they *must* feel what they ought to be to each other. Good laws will render them good; and where these exist, there is no need of flying to Heaven for rules for the preservation and happiness of society. Reason is sufficient to teach us our duties to our fellow creatures. What assistance can it receive from a religion by which it is continually contradicted and degraded?

It is said that Christianity, far from counteracting morality, is its chief support, and renders its obligations more sacred, by giving them the sanction of God. In my opinion, however, the Christian religion, instead of supporting morality, renders it weak and precarious. It cannot possibly have any solid foundation on the commands of a God, who is changing, partial, and capricious, and ordains with

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the same mouth, justice and injustice, concord and carnage, toleration and persecution. It is impossible to follow the precepts of a rational morality, under the empire of a religion which makes a merit of the most destructive zeal, enthusiasm, and fanaticism. A religion which commands us to imitate the conduct of a despot who delights to ensnare his creatures, who is implacable in his vengeance, and devotes to flaming destruction all who have the misfortune to displease him, is incompatible with all morality. The innumerable crimes with which the Christian, more than any other religion, has stained itself, have always been committed under the pretence of pleasing the ferocious God whom the Christians have inherited from the Jews. The moral character of this God, must of necessity, govern the moral conduct of those who adore him.

Morality should be founded upon invariable rules.* A God who destroys these rules, destroys his own work. If God be the creator of man, if he intends their happiness and preservation, he would have them to be just, humane, and benevolent, and averse to injustice, fanaticism, and cruelty.

We may thus see what we ought to think of those divines who pretend, that without the Christian religion there could be neither morality nor virtue among mankind. The converse of this proposition would much nigher approach the

* "It cannot be too often repeated," says Mirabaud, "that there is no morality without consulting the nature of man, and his true relations, with the beings of his species; no fixed principles for man's conduct in regulating it upon unjust, capricious, and wicked gods; no sound policies without consulting the nature of man living in society, and the way to satisfy his wants and ensure his happiness; no good government can found itself upon a despotic God—he will always make tyrants of his representatives; no laws will be good without consulting the nature and the end of society; no jurisprudence can be advantageous for nations, if it is regulated upon the caprice and passions of deified tyrants. No education will be rational unless it be founded upon Reason, and not upon chimeras and prejudices. In short, there is no virtue, no probity, no talents under corrupt masters—under the conduct of those priests who render men the enemies of themselves and of others, and who constantly and eagerly seek to stifle the seeds of reason, of science, and of courage.—*System of Nature*, vol. IV. p. 642.

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truth; and it might be maintained, that every Christian who imitates his God and practises all his commands, must necessarily be an immoral person. If it be said that those commands are not always unjust, and that the Scriptures often breathe benevolence, harmony, and equity, I answer, Christians must have an inconstant morality, sometimes good and sometimes bad, according to interest and individuals. It appears that they must either be wholly destitute of true morality, or vibrate continually from virtue to vice, and from vice to virtue.

The Christian religion is but a rotten prop to morality. It will not bear examination, and every man who discovers its defects will be ready to believe that the morality founded on such a basis can be only a chimera. Thus we often behold men, who have couched the neck beneath the yoke of religion, break loose at once, and abandon themselves to debauchery, intemperance, and every kind of vice. Escaping from the slavery of superstition, they fly to complete anarchy, and disbelieve the existence of all moral duties, because they have found religion to be only a fable. Hence, among Christians, the words *infidel* and *libertine* have become synonymous. All these inconveniences would be avoided, if mankind, instead of being taught a *theological*, were taught a *natural* morality. Instead of interdicting intemperance and vice, because they are offensive to God and religion, they should be prevented, by convincing man that they are destructive to his existence, and render him contemptible in society; that they are disapproved and forbidden by reason and nature, who aim at his preservation, and direct him to take the path that leads to permanent felicity. Whatever may be the will of God, and independently of the future rewards and punishments announced by religion, it is easy to prove to every man that it is in this world his interest to preserve his health, to respect virtue, acquire the esteem of his fellow-creatures, and, in fine, to be chaste, temperate, and virtuous. Those whose passions will not suffer them to attend to principles so clear, and reasonable, will not be more docile to the voice of religion, which they will cease to believe the moment it opposes their misguiding propensities.

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Let then the pretended advantages which the Christian religion lends morality be no longer boasted*. The principles drawn from revelation tend to its destruction. We have frequent examples of Christian nations, whose morals are far more corrupted than those of people whom they style infidels and heathens; the former are at least most subject to religious fanaticism, a passion calculated to banish justice and all the social virtues from society.

Christianity creates intolerance and persecutors, who are much more injurious to society than the most abandoned debauchees. It is at least certain, that the most Christian nations of Europe are not those where true morality is most felt and practised. In Spain, Portugal, and Italy, where the most superstitious sect of Christians has fixedits residence, people live in the most shameful ignorance of their duties. Robbery, assassination, debauchery, and persecution are there carried to their worst extreme; and yet all men are full of religion. Few virtuous men exist in those countries. There religion itself becomes an accomplice to vice, furnishes criminals with an asylum, and procures to them easy means of reconciliation with God. Presents, prayers, and ceremonies procure mankind a dispensation from the practice of virtue. Even amongst nations, who boast of possessing Christianity in all its purity, religion has so entirely absorbed the attention of its sectaries,

* Notwithstanding the happy influences attributed to the Christian religion, do we find more virtues in those who profess it, than in those who are strangers to it? Are the men redeemed by the blood of even a Deity, more honest than others? It might be imagined that we would ask in vain among Christians for rapine, fornication, adultery, and oppression. Among the orthodox courtiers who surrounded Christian thrones, do we not discover intrigues, calumny, and perfidy? Among the clergy who preach to others such redoubtable doctrines, and announce such terrible chastisements, do we not find crimes that shun the day, and every species of iniquity?—All these men are Christians, who, unbridled by their religion, continually violate the plainest duties of morality, and knowingly continue to offend a God whom they are conscious of having irritated. Yet they flatter themselves they shall be able, by a death-bed repentance, to appease that divine justice which they have insulted during the whole course of their lives.

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that morality enters not into their thoughts; and they calculate that they fulfil all their duties by a scrupulous observation of the minutiæ of superstitious ceremonies, whilst they are strangers to all social affections, and labour for the destruction of human happiness.

Christianity Unveiled, Chap. xi.

III.

Political Effects of the Christian Religion.

After having seen the inutility and even danger of the perfections, virtues, and duties proposed by the Christian religion, let us enquire whether its political influences be more happy, and whether it can in reality promote the welfare of a nation, among whom it is established and faithfully observed. We at once find, that wherever this religion is admitted, two opposite legislations, ever at variance with each other, established themselves. Although this religion preaches love and peace, it soon annihilates the effects of those precepts by the divisions which it necessarily sows among its sectaries, who unavoidably interpret differently the ambiguous oracles announced in holy writ. We find that from the infancy of religion the most acrimonious disputes have continually taken place among divines. The successive ages of Christianity have been stained with schisms, heresies, persecutions, and contests widely discordant from its boasted spirit of peace and concord, which is in fact incompatible with a religion whose precepts are so dark and equivocal. In all religious disputes each party believes that God is on its side, and consequently they are obstinate*. Indeed, how can it be otherwise, when they

* All the religions on earth declare that they have emanated from God, and pretend to possess an exclusive right to his favours. The Indian asserts that the *Brama* himself is the author of his worship. The Scandinavian derives his from the awful *Odin*. If the Jew and

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confound *the cause of God* with that of their own vanity? Thus mutually averse to concession, they quarrel and fight until force has decided a contest in which they never appeal to reason. In fact, political authorities have ever been forced to interfere in all the dissensions which have arisen among Christians. Governments have always listened to the frivolous disputes of priests, and foolishly considered them as objects of the last importance. They have conceived, that in a religion established by God himself, there could be nothing of a trifling nature. Thus princes have armed themselves against their own subjects, whose opinions differed from their's. The way of thinking at court has decided the creed and faith of subjects. Opinions supported by kings and priests have been the only true ones. Their creatures have been the guardians of orthodoxy, and were commissioned to exterminate all whom they chose to denominate heretics and rebels.

The prejudices of princes or their false policy, has caused them to consider those of their subjects who differ from themselves in religious opinions, as bad citizens, dangerous to the state, and enemies to their power. If, leaving to priests the business of finishing their own impertinent disputes, they had not assisted their quarrels and persecutions, they would have died away of themselves, and never have

the Christian have received theirs from *Jehovah*, by the ministry of Moses and Jesus, the Mahometan affirms, that he has received his from his prophet, inspired by the same God. Thus all religions pretend to a divine origin; and they all interdict the use of reason in the examination of their sacred titles. Each pretends to be the only true one, to the exclusion of all others. All menace with the wrath of Heaven those who refuse to submit to their authority; and all acquire the character of falsehood by the palpable contradictions with which they are filled; by the mis-shapen, obscure, and often odious ideas which they give of the godhead; by the whimsical laws which they attribute to him; and by the disputes which they generate among their sectaries. In short, they all appear to be a mass of impostures and reveries equally disgusting to reason. Thus on the score of pretensions, the Christian religion has no advantage over the other superstitions with which the world is infected; and its divine origin is contested by all others with as much propriety as their's is denied by it.

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disturbed the peace of nations. If those kings had impartially recompensed the good and punished the bad without regard to their worship, ceremonies, and speculative opinions, they would not have made many of their subjects such enemies to that power by which they found themselves oppressed. Christians have always attempted to reclaim heretics by injustice, violence, and persecution. Ought not they to have perceived that this conduct was calculated only to produce hypocrites and hidden enemies, or open rebellions?

But these reflections are not designed for princes, who, from their infancy, have been filled with fanaticism and prejudices. They, instead of being actuated by virtuous motives, have formed obstinate attachments to frivolities, and impetuous ardour for doctrines foreign to the welfare of their states, and a boundless wrath against all who refuse to bend to their despotic opinions. Such sovereigns find it a shorter way to destroy mankind than reclaim them by mild means. Their haughty despotism will not condescend to reason. Religion assures them that tyranny is lawful, and cruelty meritorious, when they are employed in the cause of Heaven.

The Christian religion, in fact, always makes despots and tyrants of all the sovereigns by whom it is adopted. It represents them as gods upon earth; it causes their very caprices to be respected as the will of Heaven itself. It delivers mankind into their hands as an herd of slaves, of whom they may dispose at their pleasure. In return for their zeal for religion, all the outrages upon justice that they can commit are forgiven, and their subjects are commanded under pain of the wrath of the Most High, to submit without a murmur, to the sword that strikes instead of protecting them. It is not, therefore, matter of surprise that since the establishment of this religion, we see so many nations groaning under devout tyrants, who, although obstinately attached to religion, have been unjust, licentious, and cruel. Whatever were the oppressions and ravages of these religious or hypocritical princes, the priests have not failed to preach submission to their subjects. On the other hand,

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let us not be surprised to see so many weak and wicked princes support in their turn the interest of a religion which their false policy judged necessary to the maintenance of their authority. If kings were enlightened, just and virtuous, and knew and practised their real duties, they would have had no need of the aid of superstition in governing nations. But, as it is more easy to conform to rites than to acquire talents or practise virtue, this religion has too often found in princes support for itself, and destruction for its enemies.

The ministers of religion have not had the same complaisance for princes who refused to make a common cause with them, espouse their quarrels, and become subservient to their passions. They have arisen against those who have thwarted their views, punished their excesses, touched their immunities, endeavoured to subject them to reason, or repress their ambitious designs. The priests on such occasions, cry out, *Impiety! Sacrilege!* Then they pretend that the sovereign *puts his hand to the censer*, and usurps the rights granted them by God himself. Then they endeavour to excite nations to rebellion. They arm fanatics against sovereigns, whom they declare tyrants for having been wanting in submission to the church. Heaven is always ready to revenge any injustice done to its ministers. They are themselves submissive, and preach submission to others, only when they are permitted to share the authority, or are too feeble to resist it. This is the reason why the apostles in the infancy of Christianity, being destitute of power, preached subordination. No sooner had this religion gained sufficient strength than it preached resistance and rebellion; dethroning some kings and assassinating others*.

* It is well to observe, that the priests who are perpetually crying out to the people to submit themselves to their sovereigns, because their authority is derived from Heaven—because they are the images of the divinity, presently change their language whenever the sovereign does not blindly submit to the church. The clergy uphold despotism only that it may direct its blows against their enemies; it overthrows it whenever it finds it contrary to its interests. The ministers of the invisible powers preach up obedience to the visible powers only when these are humbly devoted to them. *Mirabaud.*

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In every political body where this religion is established, there are two rival powers, which by incessant contention convulse and wound the state. The citizens divide into opposite parties, each of which fights or thinks it fights for God. These contests at different times terminate differently, but the triumphant party is always in the right. By attentive examination of such events we shall escape the dominion of fanaticism. It is by stimulating mankind to enquiry that they must be freed from the shackles of superstition. Let mankind think till they have thrown aside their prejudices, and they will think justly. The reign of the priesthood will cease, when men cease to be ignorant and credulous. Credulity is the offspring of ignorance, and superstition is the child of credulity.

But most kings dread that mankind should be enlightened. Accomplices with the priesthood they have formed a league with them to stifle reason, and persecute all who confide in its guidance. Blind to their own interest and those of their subjects, they wish only to command slaves, forgetting those slaves are always at the disposal of the priests. Thus we see science neglected and ignorance triumphant in those countries where this religion holds the most absolute dominion. Arts and sciences are the children of liberty, and separated from their parents, they languish and die. Among Christian nations, the least superstitious are the most free, powerful, and happy. In countries where spiritual and temporal despotism are leagued, the people grovel in the most shameful ignorance and lethargic inactivity. The European nations who boast of possessing the purest faith, are not surely the most flourishing and powerful. Their kings, enslaved themselves by priests, have not energy and courage enough to make a single struggle for their own welfare or that of their subjects. Priests in such states are the only order of men who are rich; other citizens languish in the deepest indigence. But of what importance are the power and happiness of nations to the sectaries of a religion who seek not for happiness in this world, who believe riches injurious, preach a God of poverty, and recommend abasement to the soul, and mortification of the

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flesh? It is, without doubt, to compel people to practise these maxims, that the clergy in many Christian states have taken possession of most of the riches, and live in splendour, while their fellow-citizens are set forward in the road to Heaven unincumbered with any burthen of earthly wealth.

Such are the political advantages society derives from the Christian religion. It forms an independent state within a state. It renders the people slaves. When sovereigns are obedient to it, it favours their tyranny; when they are disobedient, it renders their subjects fanatic and rebellious. When it accords with political power, it convulses, debases, and impoverishes nations; when not, it makes citizens unsocial, turbulent, intolerant, and mutinous*.

Christianity Unveiled, Chap. xiv.

* See, *La Contagion Sacree*, by Trenchard, published in 1768. In that work the grievous influence of superstition on governments is strikingly displayed.

IV.

CHRISTIAN CLERGY.

No religion ever placed its sectaries in more complete and continual dependance on priests than the Christian. Those harpies never lose sight of their prey. They take infallible measures for subjecting mankind, and making all contribute to their power, riches, and dominion. Having assumed the office of mediator between the heavenly monarch and his subjects, these priests are looked upon as courtiers in favour, ministers commissioned to exercise power in his name, and favourites to whom he can refuse nothing. Thus they become absolute masters of the destiny of the Christians. They gain establishments and render themselves necessary by the introduction of innumerable prac-

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tices and duties, which though puerile and ridiculous, they have the address to make their flocks consider as indispensably necessary to their salvation. They represent the omission of these pretended duties as a crime infinitely greater than an open violation of the laws of morality and reason.

Let us not then be surprised that in the most zealous, that is to say, the most superstitious sects, we see mankind perpetually annoyed with priests. Scarce are they born, when under the pretext of washing away original sin, their priests impose on them a mercenary baptism, and pretend to reconcile them with a God whom they have as yet been unable to offend. By means of a few words and magical ceremonies they are thus snatched from the dominion of Satan. From the tenderest infancy their education is frequently entrusted to priests whose principal care is to instil into them early the prejudices necessary to the views of the church. Terrors are now introduced into their minds, which increase during the whole of their lives. They are instructed in the fables, absurd doctrines, and incomprehensible mysteries of a marvellous religion; they are formed into superstitious Christians, and rendered incapable of being useful citizens or enlightened men. One thing only is represented to them as necessary, which is to be in all things devoutly submissive to religion. "Be devout," say their teachers, "be blind, despise thy reason, attend to Heaven, and neglect earth, this is all thy God demands to conduct thee to eternal felicity."

Without the consent of his priests, a Christian cannot acquire a knowledge of the mysteries of his religion, from which they assume a right to exclude him entirely. This privation, however, he has no great reason to lament. But the anathemas or excommunications of the priests generally do a real mischief to mankind. These spiritual punishments produce temporal effects, and every citizen who incurs the disgrace of the church, is in danger of that of the government, and becomes odious to his fellow citizens.

Priests have taken upon themselves the management of marriages. Without their consent, a Christian cannot legally become a father. He must first submit to the capricious for-

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malities of his religion, without which his children must be excluded from the rank of citizens.

During all his life, the Christian is obliged to assist in the ceremonies of worship under the direction of his priests. When he has performed this important duty, he esteems himself the favourite of God, and persuades himself that he no longer owes any thing to society. Thus frivolous practices take place of morality, which is always rendered subordinate to religion.

When death approaches, the Christian, stretched in agony on his bed, is still assailed in those distressful moments by priests. In some sects, religion seems to have been invented to render the bitter death of man ten thousand times more bitter. A malicious priest comes to the couch of the dying man, and holds before him, arrayed in more than all its terrors, the spectacle of his approaching end. Although this custom is destructive to citizens, it is extremely profitable to the priesthood, who owe much of their riches to legacies procured by it. Morality is not quite so highly advantaged by it. Experience proves, that most Christians live in security, and postpone till death their reconciliation with God. By means of a late repentance, and largesses to the priesthood, their faults are expiated, and they are permitted to hope, that Heaven will forget the accumulated crimes of a long and wicked life.

Death itself does not terminate the empire of the priesthood in certain sects, which find means to make money even out of the dead bodies of their followers. These, for a sufficient sum, are permitted to be deposited in temples, where they have the privilege of spreading infection and disease. The sacerdotal power extends still further. The prayers of the church are purchased at a dear rate, to deliver the souls of the dead from their pretended torments inflicted in the other world, for their purification. Happy they who are rich in a religion, whose priests, being favourites with God, can be hired to prevail on him to remit the punishments which his immutable justice had intended to inflict.

Christianity Unveiled, Chap. xiii.

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V.

Books mentioned by the Fathers, and other ancient Writers, said to have been written by Jesus Christ, his Apostles, and other Disciples.

JESUS CHRIST.

A Letter written with his own hand to Abgarus king of Edessa.
An Epistle to Peter and Paul.
The Parables and Sermons of Christ.
A Hymn which Christ secretly taught his Disciples and Apostles.
A Book of the Magic of Christ, or the Art whereby he wrought his Miracles.
A Book of the Nativity of Jesus, of the Holy Virgin his Mother, and her Midwife.
A Letter written by Christ, and dropt down from Heaven in the 6th Century.

MARY.

An Epistle to Ignatius.
Another Epistle to the Sicilians.
A Book of the Nativity of the Virgin.
The Book of the Virgin Mary and her Midwife.
The History and Traditions of Mary.
The Book of Mary, concerning the Miracles of Christ, and the Ring of King Solomon.
The greater and lesser Questions of Mary.
The Book of the Progeny of Mary.

PETER.

The Gospel of Peter.
—— Acts of Peter.
—— Revelation of Peter.
Another Revelation.
The Epistle of Peter to Clemens.
The Disputation of Peter and Appion.
The Doctrine of Peter.
—— Preaching of Peter.
—— Liturgy of Peter.
—— Itinerary of Peter.
—— Judgment of Peter.

ANDREW.

The Gospel of Andrew.
—— Acts of Andrew.

JAMES.

The Gospel of James.
—— Liturgy of James.
A Book on the Death of the Virgin.

JOHN.

The Acts of John.

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Another Gospel of John.
The Itinerary of John,
——Liturgy of John.
——Traditions of John.
——Epistle of John to the Hydropic.
A Book on the Death of Mary.
The Memorial of Jesus Christ, and his Descent from the Cross.
Another Revelation of John.

BARTHOLOMEW.

The Gospel of Bartholomew.

PHILIP.

The Gospel of Philip.
——Acts of Philip.

THOMAS.

The Gospel of Thomas.
——Acts of Thomas.
——Book of the infancy of Christ.
——Revelations of Thomas.
——Itinerary of Thomas.

MATTHEW.

A Book of the Infancy.
The Liturgy of Matthew.

MARK.

The Liturgy of Mark.
——Gospel of the Egyptians.
——Passion of Barnabas.

THADDEUS.

The Gospel of Thaddeus.

MATTHIAS.

The Gospel of Matthias.
——Traditions of Matthias.
——Acts of Matthias.

PAUL.

The Acts of Paul.
——Acts of Paul and Thecla.
——Epistle to the Laodiceans.
A Third Epistle to the Thessalonians.
A Third Epistle to the Corinthians.
An Epistle from the Corinthians, with Paul's Answer.
The Epistles to and from Seneca.
The Revelations of Paul.
Another Revelation,
The Visions of Paul.
——Anabaction of Paul.
——The Gospel of Paul.
——Preaching of Paul.
——Narrative concerning the charming of Vipers.
——Precepts of Peter and Paul.

BARNABAS.

The Gospel of Barnabas.
——Epistle of Barnabas.

When we find Christianity at its very commencement, inundated with so many Gospels, Epistles, Revelations, &c. the greater part of which are regarded as authentic by a vast majority of Christians of the present day, by what

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criterion are we to determine that the books received by protestants are the only works possessing Divine Authority? —The difficulty increases when it is recollected that these books, before the invention of printing, were liable to be altered and interpolated at pleasure. Printing was invented in the year 1450, and first brought to England by William Caxton in 1471. The first translation of the Bible from the Hebrew was by order of Ptolemy Philadelphus, 277 years B. C. The translation called the Septuagint was made by the LXX, or rather by seventy-two persons in seventy-two days. From this the vulgate or Latin translation was first printed in 1462, and called Jerom's of Prague. The first English translation of the Bible was by order of Henry the VIII. Act 27th, 1541. That now in use by James I. 1611, Act 8th.

If the Bible be the word of God, it requires not the wretched aid of prosecutions to defend it; and the legislature might with as much propriety enact a law to protect the rays of the sun as to protect the Bible, if the Bible, like the sun, be the work of God.

THE END.

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