



Chas. H. Reynolds.

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THE
THEOLOGICAL VAMPIRE
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EXPOSED.

IN A SERIES OF LECTURES:

SHOWING THAT
THE MIRACULOUS MYTHOLOGY OF CHRISTIANITY
HAD FOR PROTOTYPE, THE THEOLOGY OF
THE ANCIENT PAGANS.

For with strong speech I tore the veil that hid
NATURE, and TRUTH, and LIBERTY.

LAON AND CYTHNA.

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P R E F A C E.

A GREAT and learned prelate of the Church of England has declared that ‘authority is the greatest and most irreconcilable enemy to truth and rational argument that this world ever furnished out since it was in being;—against it there is no defence:—it is authority alone that keeps up the grossest and most abominable errors in the countries around us: it was authority that would have prevented all reformation where it is, and which has put a barrier against it where it is not.’ Here are five luminous truths, expressed in the most simple and laconic manner: yet the philosopher, who studies nature, and follows truth ought not to be discouraged on account of this formidable antagonist; he must have the firmness to speak the truth boldly for the sake of the few who are capable and willing to think for themselves; for, unless we are allowed to endeavour to convince others of the truth of our opinions, all teaching may as well be laid aside: but as for the bulk of mankind, who take human fictions and fancies for heavenly instructions, and who

are the voluntary slaves of prejudices, error, and superstition, they are as incapable of discerning the truth as frogs are of flying.

The rational and virtuous education of youth can never take place in countries where the mind of man is enslaved by authority, and where the ecclesiastics, who have an opposite and exclusive interest, engross not only the education of youth, but keep the consciences of old men under their control, and being backed by the false zeal and ignorance of the people, the few who have penetration and judgment are obliged to give way to the prevailing absurdities. We are exceedingly apt and ready in condemning the ridiculous creeds of other nations, while our own contains as great, if not greater absurdities, to which, nevertheless, we give the most implicit assent; the articles of our faith and creeds being handed down from our predecessors, and to which we have the title of tradition only. The greater the ignorance and folly of the people, the more easily will they be imposed upon by crafty mystagogues, and when the latter have really no religion, (perhaps a very common case), and the former abound in the wild zeal of the fanatic, the church, we may rest assured, is in a flourishing condition. But all systems founded on notions of preternatural revelation, are in great danger when men

place their religion in virtue and sound morality; for then the people have no bigoted veneration for the ‘Sacerdotal Stole,’ and priests would be held in no estimation, except in as far as they set the example of virtuous habits, in promoting the moral good of society:* but wherever morality is not made the ground-work of religion, they have succeeded in making the people believe that eternal happiness can be dispensed by them alone, or at least through their means; and in thus getting the management of what they call spirituals in their own hands, the highest degree of temporal advantage has necessarily followed, and in this latter point they have succeeded so admirably, that in almost all the Christian countries of Europe, the temporal interest of the priesthood is mistaken, and passes for the soul-saving spiritual interest of the laity.

* Instead of a theological, men should be 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; 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.—*Ecce Homo*.

We all have sufficient means of knowing how widely the Christian world differ in the religion they teach; what absurd revolutions of opinion have been amongst them, and the horrid scenes of inhuman cruelty which these differences have occasioned; what monstrous absurdities prevail in most places, and what excessive ignorance everywhere;—the madness of inventing a revelation to patch up what they call the defects of reason, and again super-adding reason to supply the defects of revelation.

When we duly consider these melancholy realities, and the sad evils they produce, we are warranted in asserting that such a state of things would not be tolerated or endured amongst men, were they not compelled by that power and authority which the Church derives from its pernicious connection with the State; for it was one of the grandest points ever effected by the clergy of any country in former times, to get their superstition made ‘part and parcel of the law of the land.’ This was clenching the fetters upon men’s minds, for whoever ventured to attack the knavish absurdities of the priest,* was punished by the civil magistrate: and thus the honest and the virtuous became sufferers for

* Scioppius gives us this definition of a Catholic church:—‘We are,’ says he, ‘a stall, or herd, or multitude of beasts and asses,

obeying their reason in preference to revelation, it appearing to them more certain that God is the author of human reason, than that he is the author of any particular book. It is perfectly amazing that it should enter the head of any man to suppose that he has, or can possibly have, a right to dictate to others in matters of opinion, and still more so that men should be so weak as to admit and allow of such tyranny: yet such is the credulity of those who have never been allowed to think for themselves, that the clergy find it an easy task to impose any thing upon the obedient people, if they recommend it with a convenient gravity and solemnity; this holds good with respect to all religions, whatever may be their component parts, for if we take a look into Pagan or Christian traditions, we shall find that their Theological legends were chiefly composed of Mythological fables,—the Jews copying from the Egyptians, Phenicians, and Chaldeans; and the Christians, after the second century, when the primitive principles of the Son of Mary no longer existed, imitated all of them in the way of parody.

and they (the priests) bridle us, they saddle us, they harness us, they spur us, they lay yokes and burdens upon us.' I will add, that our own priests would do all that Scioppius complains of, *if they had the power.*

The ancient Egyptians, from the use of hieroglyphics in their religious ceremonies, gradually introduced the greatest absurdities;—the Ox, that patient and laborious animal, was at first nothing more than a symbolical representation of the means by which the earth was cultivated; but this simple idea was afterwards forgotten in the ignorance of the people, who began in downright earnest to adore the beast itself;—in like manner, but with still greater absurdity, we of modern times, having created our deity, degrade him into a similitude with ourselves, and then we eat and drink him!!!

The hierophants, or religious impostors of antiquity, taught their silly followers to adore female deities, who, by their own account, were guilty of every species of debauchery,—to worship goddesses greatly inferior to the courtesans. Such in every age has been the true character of all those traffickers in divine commodities, or preternatural deceptions, that whenever any chimera, no matter how shameful and humiliating to reason, was adopted, and suited their interest, they would never allow themselves to be undeceived, but imagined a thousand wretched shifts, rather than abandon the most palpable error: but this is not to be wondered at, since they live by the weakness and folly of the bulk of mankind.

To multiply human virtues depends upon societies well ordered and regulated by good laws, to nourish and protect those virtues ;—instead of which, the most effectual means are most commonly applied to ends that are of all others the least to be desired, and every vigilance and anxious care is taken to instil in early youth nonsensical creeds which of necessity can have no other ground to rest upon than the supposed knowledge and veracity of those deeply-interested teachers ; and it is too certain that in this predicament, a very large majority of our fellow creatures continue to be children all their lives. Partly from an indolence of mind, and partly from a superstitious timidity, they never once attempt to examine matters thoroughly, but contentedly take up with such notions, right or wrong, as their instructors see their own interest in adopting for them and what thus begins in faith cannot end in reason. It is obvious therefore that the pliant, passive belief of this vast majority of mankind, must be entirely at the discretion of the ruling powers in church and state, and consequently, should these powers adopt a new religion, with rituals and creeds diametrically opposite to the present, the mass* of the people would go on to think

* St Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers, says, ‘since the Nicene Synod, we have done nothing but write creeds, while we fight about words,

themselves bound to believe in the manner prescribed by authority; or in whatsoever way their godfathers and godmothers had engaged for them to believe;—and hereby the ignominious fetters of mental slavery are rivetted, although there is nothing in the case that has any thing to do with belief, properly so called, because, that which alone deserves that name, is the result of a full and satisfactory conviction of the judgment; and for any man to say that he believes in that which he never allowed himself to examine thoroughly, is as direct a falsehood as it is possible for him to utter.

Any thing in the form of apology for self-evident truths, cannot have any effect on these who have so little sense as to deny them:—they are the foundation of all reasoning, and the only just bottom on which men can proceed in convincing one another, and by consequence, whoever is capable of denying them, is not in a condition to be informed, and under such a distempered state of mind, it remains only for them to follow their own disordered fancies, or what is more common, to be guided by the

and quarrel about things doubtful; we decree every year of the lord, a new creed concerning God; nay, every change of the moon our faith is altered. We repent of our decrees,' (as we have made God repent of his), 'we defend those who have repented of them, and we anathematize those we have defended.'

dictates of artful, and deeply interested men ; or by crazy-brained fanatics, for as truth will never serve the purposes of knaves, so it will never suit the understanding of fools ; and the latter will ever be as well pleased in being deceived, as the former in deceiving : and when we consider that private interest is a more formidable enemy to truth than ignorance, and that in the present case, its chief security consists in the fostering of ignorance, the prospect of any very considerable mental improvement amongst the bulk of mankind, is greatly darkened, and almost hopeless, for this private interest in the priesthood creates the love of wealth, avarice, ease, and power ; disguised under the imposing robes of the order, giving them that ascendancy in society that is well calculated to perpetuate these evils ; and having ignorance and prejudice as their steady upholders, they are likely to continue as they ever have done, fatally to mislead the million by subduing their reason, palming upon them absurd and unintelligible dogmas as the clear and equitable precepts of the Supreme Being, and hereby banishing truth and honest sincerity, and consequently, goodness and virtue, all arising from the foundation of truth ; for there cannot possibly be any thing deserving of the name of goodness, unless it has truth's impression.

As the growth of miracles appears most abundant in the compilation of what is called the Old Testament, it may be observed here, in the prefatory way, that, although the Mosaic accounts of the originals of men and things are in many instances so perfectly ridiculous as to excite our risibility, yet such is the force of custom* and pre-instilled opinions, that they are embraced without the least scruple or examination; but if we had read stories of a like absurd and incredible nature in the writings of one of the early Mahometans, or in those of a Grecian philosopher, our minds would have been filled with objections, and the relation of each prodigy would have met with scorn and sarcasm rather than belief; and how can this difference arise, but from the early impression that is made on our minds that Moses had heavenly inspirations?

The title of an atheistical or heretical pamphlet will be bestowed upon these lectures by any fiery zealot into

* ————— The queen of slaves,
The hood-winked angel of the blind and dead,
CUSTOM, with iron mace, points to the graves
Where her own standard desolately waves
Over the dust of prophets and of Kings.
Many yet stand in her array; she paves
Her path with human hearts, and o'er it flings
The wildering gloom of her immeasurable wings.

whose hands they may fall; and under the pretence of being a champion for truth, he is supported by ignorance and malice as his seconds. But does he know wherein the nature of atheism consists? It would be atheism to assert that there is no Almighty Power ruling the universe, or to deny the benevolent providence of that power. Men holding such opinions as these would be atheists, but not so much so as those bigoted fanatics who, building upon false premises, continue obstinately in the most absurd errors. The unthinking herd of mankind, whose superstition is grounded upon the assimilation of the Supreme Being with themselves, are apt to think that every one they hate is the enemy of the Almighty Power, and that all who differ from them in opinion are atheists; not rightly considering that he is the best Christian who is the most honest man. And, therefore, if any man blames me for comparing Christianity with Paganism, he shows nothing but his unworthy distrust of the sufficiency of the religion he professes.

LECTURE I.

—— Somewhat I would say,
But fear,—let fear, for once, to truth give way.

DRYDEN.

Thou, reader, who art free from other cares,
Receive right reason's truth with well purged ears ;
Lest what I write, and send you for your good,
Be scorned and damn'd before well understood.

LUCRETIVS.

ON MIRACLES.

It is contrary to nature, to reason, and to all experience, that a miracle should be true ; but it is not contrary to nature, to reason, or to experience, that a man, or a class of men who lived about two thousand years ago, should propagate falsehoods : on the contrary, falsehood is a coin that has ever been in ready currency amongst mankind, and the more outrageous it is against truth and common sense, the more readily it has generally been received by the ignorant and deluded multitude ; because, in things supernatural the weak mind is taken

by surprise, is strongly affected, and adheres, unites, and commits itself without ever comprehending them, “and it is too late to make use of reason after we have long subjected it to the obedience of faith.”

A very profound philosopher has observed that, “A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature, and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined; and therefore, no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle unless the testimony be of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish.”—The stupendous order of nature, the revolution of hundreds of millions of globes or worlds, round a million of suns, may be called miraculous, yet in all this nature is still in an even and invariable course, acting by self-existing laws, immutable and inviolable. If it should be asked, “Cannot a law that is established by God himself be suspended by its author?” we reply that it cannot; for, beside the impossibility, there is the highest degree of impious arrogance in venturing to suppose that the omnipotent all-ruling power would act as men do in making laws that were afterwards to be suspended or violated.

It appears clearly enough that the mass of miraculous stuff that has been handed down to us from the early times of our holy church, and which we are called upon to believe, was manifestly confuted even in those very times; and for this strong reason, some of the primitive priests or fathers, viz. Origen, Eusebius of Cæsaria, Julius Africanus, and others, have taken care to destroy or mutilate the works of almost all those philosophers and men of learning who lived in or near their own times, and who exposed the tricks and legerdemain of the early fabricators of our religion, who had even then departed entirely from the moral simplicity of the original: they have left us nothing of Berosus, or of Celsus the epicurean, except as much of them as it suited their ends to quote in their own works; and as for Manetho, Porphyry Symmachus, and others, they are so mutilated that we have only fragments of them remaining.* After destroying or suppressing the works of those learned men whose arguments they could not answer,—after making away with such respectable authorities against

* The books written by the most learned philosophers were forbidden, on pretence that they were written by heathens; and the bishops themselves, at the Council of Carthage, about the year 400, were interdicted the reading of heathen authors; for they said that Saint Jerome himself had been whipped with rods by an angel sent expressly from heaven, *for reading Cicero's works.*

their artful and imposing systems, their successors in the church now tell us that miracles are no longer wanted, but that formerly they were wrought in favour of mankind, for the purpose of establishing the Christian religion; but had not all the old religions the same pretensions to miracles? Are not the Pagan legends and traditions full of them? And have not a vast number of them been imitated and dressed up afresh by the Christians? But the most absurd and extravagant miracle of all is to imagine that the supreme power should, in favour of a few ants on their little ball of earth, derange the operation of those eternal and immutable laws inherent in, and inseparable from matter, and which govern the vast machinery of the universe. Such departures from nature are the delusive ravings of theological art, but everything that has not reason *in it* and *for it*, is man's superstition, and not religion of God's or nature's making; so all religions except that of nature and reason, bear the impression of man, that is, of fraud and falsehood. The favours of that supreme power which rules all nature (by nature's laws alone) consist in its laws themselves, and therefore to dare to ascribe miracles, or what is the same thing, fickleness and imbecility to it, is an impious insult, allowing for a moment that poor miserable man can insult that power so tran-

scendently great as to be altogether beyond his comprehension.

We have seen that all religions from the highest antiquity have had their miracles, and why should not the Christians have theirs also? for their priests stood as much in need of them as did those of the older systems of the Pagan religions; so accordingly they adopted as an example the Pagan and Jewish mythology and rites, perceiving the immense power and influence that miracle and mystery held over the vulgar mind; but this species of delusion was everywhere, and in all ages, almost wholly confined to the illiterate rabble; “for all the philosophers and historians of Greece and Rome are either silent in regard to such fooleries, or treat them with derision and contempt; for these sages were very far from admitting the tricks of priests, or the bigotry of the lower orders of mankind, as the standard of truth.”

It is not only remarkable but surprising, that all nations who have given up the simplicity of nature, and become what is called civilized and polished, have fabricated books of theological mysteries and prodigies which may justly be regarded as the source of the greatest evils and calamities experienced by mankind: in them we discover the root and germ of intolerance, the ran-

corous hatred that springs from the conflicting dogmas of priests, the religious wars consequent thereon, and the dreadful devastations which superstition, backed by authority, has entailed upon the human race. This is the religion of unnatural prodigies, that has rendered men morose and unsociable, gloomy-minded, fierce, and cruel; and to act in everything throughout their lives with a tendency to all that is destructive of their common welfare; but chiefly in the expedient which they have found out, at a vast expense, of hiring persons to bewilder reason and common sense. As these religions have multiplied, and again been subdivided into sects, the erection of more churches entailed so much additional expense upon the industry of the people to maintain them, while the black train of evils already noted has increased in equal proportion.

Nothing but reasoning can improve reason, and no book can improve my reason in any point, unless it gives me convincing proofs of its reasonableness; and a revelation that will not suffer us to examine and judge of its dictates by our reason, is so far from improving, that it forbids the use of reason, and if that faculty is left unexercised, it will have as little force as unexercised limbs.

All belief in miracles must necessarily exclude reason

and experience, and so general has been the infatuated belief in them, that it would be difficult to mention a single nation in which the most incredible prodigies have not been performed; and it has always happened that the most monstrous and absurd have been invented in those countries where the mass of the people had little knowledge of reading and writing, and consequently they were the secure and easy prey of their spiritual lords the priests. Thus we see, that amongst the numerous systems of revealed religion with which the credulity of man has been saddled, not one of them has been without its code of miracles, and the priests of each have invariably denied the truth of every one except their own; and each of these infallible guides will give you an unerring rule, one that, according to their own asseveration, cannot err, that is, by an implicit *belief by faith* in the particular doctrine that each of them promulgates. Now, that which proceeds from reason and common sense, we know to be true, but what proceeds from faith is believed only as a sort of obligation.*

* Neither reason nor study, says Boulanger, are necessary to men who 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

There is a vast difference between knowing and believing; and yet it must be confessed that with the exception of that famous old personage, the devil, faith is the best working tool in the shop of every priest, for by it he secures a blind obedience, but without the former he can do nothing whatever; indeed they are mutually necessary to each other, for the devil can do nothing without the church, because his dominion and power are ever most extensive when the theologians succeed in preventing all freedom of inquiry and discussion, which they will do while their numbers are multiplied everywhere, and their power enlarged even to the use of the temporal sword. Let them therefore lay aside the folly of pretending to weaken or destroy his Satanic Majesty, whether his existence be real or imagi-

most enlightened men seldom make the best Christians,—science is apt to embarrass faith. If science be serviceable to political society, ignorance is much more so to revealed religion and its ministers. Those ages destitute of science and industry, were the golden ages of the Christian church. 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 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.

nary, since it is evident that their own interest is mainly promoted by increasing his name and power; and with respect to himself, he may rest assured that he would cut but a sorry figure in the world were it not for the church.*

The belief in miracles is nearly related to the detestable folly of crediting the foul accusations for witchcraft, and in the darker ages, when the church had more power, the clergy were commonly the chief promoters of the prosecutions against the unhappy and helpless creatures who were charged with this imaginary crime, the executions of whom cannot be looked upon as anything else than so many murders; and all good men who endeavoured to expose them as such were branded by the church as Atheists; but these, unhappily, being very few in number, were quite unequal to the task of wresting out of the priests' hands the power of taking away so many innocent people's lives and reputations.

The greatest philosophers of antiquity ranked superstition amongst the vices, making the happiness of man

* Men vainly imagine they have discovered the principles of good and evil by calling the one God and the other Devil, when in reality they have only personified these relative terms which are expressive of our perceptions; and worship a creature of their own imagination, for an immaterial deity exists only in the mind of man.

in life to consist in the practice of virtue, and freedom from superstition; and on the contrary, the greatest misery in life to consist in being vicious, and believing in supernaturals. Another great mind amongst the ancients describes superstition as a terrible evil, arising from education, or the natural weakness of the human mind, oppressing nearly the whole of mankind. If you give way to it, says he, it will ever haunt and plague you: all the tranquillity of the mind will be destroyed; and sleep itself, which seems to be an asylum and refuge from all trouble and uneasiness, does by the phantoms of superstition increase your troubles and fears. From all which evils you can alone be freed by following that plain, consistent, and rational system of religion, which is obvious in the book of nature, and whose basis is truth and morality: all other systems give rise to those vicious passions which spring from the clouds of error and falsehood.

In what are called the schools of divinity, youth LEARNS to believe in the manner that suits the theologian; but the man of unbiased reflection believes that only which appears to him true, and cannot believe otherwise; therefore, belief cannot be a duty, and the attempt to make it even meritorious, or the want of it criminal, is a downright mark of imposture; for truth

requires only a reasonable conviction, not a blind obedience. But if miracles were formerly performed for the purpose of converting mankind, and supposing that all the believing part of the world had turned infidels, as the consequence of their having ceased, yet not a single sensible miracle could now be produced to re-save the world, or what is more to Christian priests, to save their livings and dignities. That the majority of the educated in society are still priest-ridden is perfectly evident, yet such a fable as the New Testament story of the devils and the swine, would not in these days be ventured upon; and if the same crime had been laid to the charge of Mahomet in terms so ill judged as to confess such atrocious iniquity, he would have been branded by your divines as an abominable wizard, independent of the robbery committed on the owners of the swine.* The ingenuous and truth-loving Meslier, a

* It appears that the devils possessing the two demoniacs who lived among the tombs, could not be dislodged without terms of capitulation, one article of which was that they should be allowed to go into the swine. The spokesman of these devils announced that he was legion, or called legion, probably from being the chief of a detachment consisting of that number. The treaty being concluded, the devils took possession of their new subjects accordingly, who, feeling a most devilish commotion within them, committed suicide immediately: nor was this rash act wonderful when we consider that there were only "*about two thousand*" swine, so

French curate, treats the ridiculous adventure of the devil carrying away Jesus to the top of a mountain, the marriage of Cana, and the story of the loaves and fishes, as absurd tales, injurious to the goodness of the Supreme Being, and which, for more than the three first centuries, were altogether unknown in the Roman empire; and at last brought forward from the lowest dregs of the community, and palmed by the priests upon the wicked and worthless emperors, after their apostacy from the religion of their forefathers; and when policy compelled them to adopt the nonsense and foolish bigotry of the people, in order to keep them the better in subjection.

To rectify abuses that have kept their ground for so many centuries, and remove such a host of prejudices so long instilled by habit and education, is now become exceedingly difficult; for, besides private interest, pride, passion, and obstinacy, stand as bulwarks in their defence, and men will rarely suffer correction in those religious points where they think their judgment and good sense have been arraigned; and in the rancour of that

that there would be the proportion of three devils to each pig, reckoning a legion of devils to consist of the same number as a Roman legion. I wish that some theologian or commentator would inform me whether Jesus or the devils were most guilty in this wholesale HOMICIDE.

fanatical hatred,* which of all others is the most deadly, they will even condemn reason and the light of nature as forming an ignis-fatuus to lead the world to perdition.

In former times, when ignorance was more prevalent than it now is, it was believed as certain, that the almighty power denounced his anger by means of miracle, and other marvellous phenomena, but in these times all such appearances are known, even to demonstration, to be common effects of natural causes, determined by laws that nothing can change; but still the vanity of this sensible, intelligent, thinking being called man, in the pride of his heart, believes himself to be the sole object of divine predilection, forming his God after his own peculiar model; and hugging himself

* In the time of that wise heathen philosopher Ammianus Marcellinus, the Christians bore such hatred to each other, that, as he complains, "no beasts were such deadly enemies to men, as the more savage Christians were generally to one another." What would he have said of them if he had lived in the sixteenth century, when in Catholic countries he beheld the princes and nobles proud of serving the inquisition in the most inhuman and detestable offices, such as carrying with their own hands the holy faggots for the burning of heretics? Our religion is said to be one of peace; yet upon a moderate calculation it has destroyed in the world nine millions seven hundred and eighteen thousand eight hundred persons, burnt, hanged, drowned, shot, and tortured, all for the love of God and the honor of his Son.

with this favourite notion, he wants no proof of that which he wishes to believe ; and we know of no demonstration that is strong enough to prove the falsehood of a favourite opinion. But the most monstrous of all the miracles that knavery has devised, and folly sanctioned, is perhaps the Jewish one, of the creation of matter out of nothing, a proposition so unsightly and enormous, that the rational mind rejects it at once, as the ravings of insanity ; but on the other hand, the reflecting mind has no difficulty in the simple idea of the eternity of matter ; even the theologian himself must agree that it would require one of his miracles to annihilate a single atom of matter, yet he will maintain that a being which he describes as an immaterial existence, without extent, drew from its own source the thousands of globes which we behold, *and which source is declared to be NOTHING*. This is arriving at the acmé of absurdity, through the wanderings of a distempered fancy, for it is beyond the grasp of human intellect to conceive any distinct idea of such a being ; but when the light of nature and reason are discarded, faith and miracle come readily into play. In thus setting aside all miracle and all prodigy, as the inventions of knavery to impose upon weak and credulous minds, it may be asked, “ Do you then, when you fully allow that there is an omnipotent power which

rules everything, deny that it has the power to work miracles if necessary?" The answer is, that it never can be necessary, or even possible for that power to violate its own modes of action, or those laws by which it necessarily operates: this would be inconsistency with itself, which is utterly impossible. But in this matter, as in everything else, the pride and folly of man will not allow him to refrain from measuring the supreme all-in-all by the scale of human conception; and being in the constant habit of violating the laws which he has made in society, he attributes the same frailties and passions to his deity. The same infatuation, infused by false education, has made him believe that he himself was produced at first by a miracle; but to talk of the first man is as silly and unphilosophical as it would be to talk about the first blade of grass, the first elephant, the first worm, or the first fish. These animals, and this blade of grass, are so many natural productions of the surface of this globe, and man himself, with all his pretensions, is nothing else: and should superstition, war, and pestilence, those perpetual scourges of the earth, remove entirely by one fell sweep the whole of the human race from the face of the earth, the sun would still give his light, day and night would succeed each other, rain would fall, rivers would run, and woods would grow, in the same

manner as if nothing had happened to this pretended favourite of heaven.

If man would get rid of such follies (with which his miseries are nearly connected), and arrive at that happiness of which his natural organization is capable, it is sufficient that he wills it, by removing those obstructions by which his mind is enslaved; and this he must owe wholly to himself,—to his own free exertions in finding out what human existence really is; and a knowledge of his true wants, and proper manner of life, will necessarily follow; but this useful knowledge never can be derived from the vain and shadowy study of imaginary beings, with their supposed train of supernatural actions, but from the study of the physical and intellectual powers displayed in nature herself, in which there is no deception. The idea of a miracle being indisputably contrary to the course of nature, and of all experience, the question arises, who can really in his mind believe or consent to anything that is so flatly opposed to his reason? for denying a thing with a man's heart is nothing else than the gain-saying and dissent of a man's reason;—yet men will subject that excellent and unerring light to the dead letter of a book, which has been varied, corrupted, and misinterpreted in thousands of different ways, to suit human passions and

interests; and which, in all probability, was compiled by many different hands, and at various periods, in rude imitation of oriental books of much higher antiquity; such as the scriptures of the Bramins, called the Shaster, the scriptures of the Persees, called the Zundavastaw; or those of the Bonzes of China, which they say were written by Fo-He, whom they call God, and *Saviour of the world, by giving satisfaction for the sins of men.* We have also the scriptures of Sommonocodom, whom the Talapoins of Siam say *was born of a virgin,** and was the God expected by the universe.

* The story of what is called the miraculous conception, can be accounted for in a very easy and natural way. "According to the apocryphal Gospel of the Nativity of Mary, which father Jerome Xavier entirely adopts, Mary, when a child, was consecrated to the Lord, by the usual vow, and was brought up in the Temple, which she did not leave until she was sixteen years of age. This naturally created a suspicion that her pregnancy was the effect of some intrigue of the priests, who made her believe, or say, that it was God who had begotten a child upon her."—*Codex Apocryph: N. T.*

The high priest himself was, in all probability, the chief actor in this sacerdotal intrigue, for he anxiously pitched upon old Joseph to be the husband of Mary; and St Epiphanius assures us in his book of 'Heresie,' that Joseph was very old at the time of his marriage with the *Virgin*; and adds, that he was the father of six children by his first wife. And, moreover, the Gospel ascribed to St James the Younger, declares that the good old man espoused

Let us call to mind how many juggling tricks of heathen and popish priests are recorded in history for miracles, and numerous other impositions for the wonderful works of their gods and saints; but are they capable of the same evidence as other historical facts? How easy it is for the pious mind (especially in females) to be induced to believe the most notorious frauds that have the face of piety, and seem done to promote it! But prophecies and miracles have no foundation in God or nature, and consequently none in truth; but are created wholly in the imaginations of men, to answer the purposes of fraud, or arise from the false ideas that men have of the supreme power, the false gods they have imagined and set up, which strike profound awe and terror into the distorted conceptions of their abject supplicants.

Mary with very great reluctance, as the disparity of their ages intimidated him exceedingly, but the high priest prevailed on him at last; and it further informs us of the very ill humour of Joseph, when he found that his wife had been pregnant before their marriage, and the reproaches with which he loaded her, on account of her lewdness, unworthy, as he thought, of a virgin reared under the eyes of the priests. Mary, as is usual in such cases, "excused herself, with tears and protestations, and swore by the living God, that she did not know who begot the child upon her;" which might indeed be true, if there was a sacerdotal co-partnership in the business. "It appears that in her distress, she even forgot the adventure of the arch-angel Gabriel."

The votaries of superstitious folly tell us that our reason is blinded and lost, so as in nowise to be trusted as a guide, and at the same time they declare that it is abominable wickedness to suspect the letter and authenticity of those books already alluded to, and which they pretend to idolize, as being heaven-descended. They account it great piety in a man not to trust his reason and judgment, but perverse wickedness to doubt the fidelity of those who compiled, and caused to be adopted as the word of God, the dissonant volumes in question. If the host of miracles that are related in the said books, called scriptures, are, as priests tell us they are, so many appeals to our reason and senses, for the truth and authority of the heavenly commission of those by whom they are said to have been wrought, then we say, let them be tried at the same tribunal of our reason and senses; and if they cannot abide the test thereof, let them be rejected, and their authorities along with them; for the liberty of thinking, writing, and judging for ourselves in religion, is a natural, and even a Protestant right, for the preservation of which we ought to be incessantly on our guard; otherwise our understandings, as well as our purses, will be ridden and oppressed by a designing and tyrannical priesthood.

Nothing that is rational and consistent can be understood from what are called the 'commands of God,' except the concatenation of natural causes and things; and by his decrees nothing else is meant than the universal laws of nature, or eternal verity and necessity, which are one and the same thing; and, therefore, the more we know of natural things, the more we have acquired of the knowledge of the supreme power; and to be able to account for effects by knowing their causes, is to know so much of the immutable essence of that power. When the ancient philosophers said that such a thing was done by a god, or the gods, they were only using words suited to the capacity of the vulgar, and their meaning was that the thing was done according to the invariable and eternal rules of nature; and not, as the ignorant imagine, that nature was idle, or her laws interrupted or suspended.

There is nothing more improbable than that the reformer, who is a follower of nature, and a moralist, and whose endeavour it is to expose the arts of theologians, should have any pretensions to preternatural powers; and, therefore, there is no reason to believe that the reputed founder of the christian religion, either wrought, or pretended to work miracles; but as soon as that system, to which his name has been affixed, began

to have a hireling priesthood, then were miracles attributed to him in abundance; and that they have been believed through these latter ages of the church, is not at all wonderful: the priest had his interest in them; the ignorant and superstitious had a comfort in them, and the wise and considerate, from the fear of persecution, dared not to inquire into their foundation, however marvellous and absurd; although they appeared to them the most manifest and the most self-evident impostures that were ever put upon the world, yet they have been successful in passing through many ages and nations, with a reputation that is perfectly wonderful; and all by mere dint of the zealous exertions, and overpowering influence of that privileged body of men, whose interest will still be the same and indivisible in every part of the world, and whose cunning and well adapted oratory tickles the ears, whilst it warps the understandings of the million, stupifying their minds with dogmas and doctrines about faith and mystery, which are past all understanding.* Thus has truth been

* The first of the christian virtues is faith;—it consists in an IMPOSSIBLE CONVICTION of the revealed doctrines, and absurd fables, which our 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

debased and degraded by faith,—a faith that has made men mad, exciting the nearest relations to hate, persecute, and even to destroy each other.

In addition to the invention of miracles, the compilers of the Jewish Scriptures have also ascribed to the Supreme Being the most downright inconsistencies and contradictions, and those who maintain that the bible contains no such direct imputations, assert what is not true, for of this there are numerous instances; but for the sake of brevity we shall notice only the two following in Deuteronomy, chap. 4th and verse 24th. Moses, or some person for him, expressly declares that God is a consuming fire, although he had directly before, in the

of the truth of the doctrines and miracles that every christian must believe, under the penalty of damnation. It forbids all doubt and inquiry; it reduces man to the passive acquiescence of brutes, 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, in order to subject them to their own authority. If faith be a virtue, it is certainly useful only to the spiritual guides of the christians, for they alone gather its fruits. They represent this reason as perverted, and an unfaithful guide, by which they seem to intimate that it was not intended for reasonable beings. What grounds then has 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!!—*Boulanger.*

12th verse of the same chapter, denied that God was visible, or like any visible thing. In 1st Samuel, 15th chap. verse 29th, it is directly denied that God ever repents of his decrees; but Jeremiah, on the contrary, affirms, in chap. 18th, verse 8th and 10th, that God repents both of the good and evil that he had purposed and decreed. Besides such abominable contradictions, the fanatic devoutly accuses the Almighty Power of crimes that are rarely committed by the worst of men, such as requiring the sacrifice of the innocent to expiate the crimes of the guilty.

A miracle, being a pretended fact that is contrary to nature, admits of no natural evidence, however positively the fact may be asserted; but anything deserving of the name of evidence cannot possibly exist, because the fact in its own nature excludes all evidence; but on the other hand, the conceptions that any man frames to himself, agreeably to the course of nature from his own experience and observation, are not prejudices depending on his will or imagination, but have their foundation in sense and reason, which can never contradict the truth of things, and truth requires no man's assent without conviction. But he that is persuaded to believe anything contrary to the known laws of nature, because there are things which he never can know, is seduced to

give up his understanding. It is therefore of the highest importance that men should be on their guard against a blind and implicit faith,—against believing anything out of the sight and reach of their reason and judgment; but on all occasions to assert the right, and even the necessity, of having the unquestionable liberty to think, speak, and write freely about religion, for the correction of error and discovery of truth,—to restore the world when it shall be ripe for it, to the primitive religion of nature, which, according to Jesus himself, “is the end of the law and the prophets;” from which expression, together with a number of others which have been attributed to him, it sufficiently appears that the reformation he intended was the establishment of this religion amongst his countrymen, the wiser part of whom being wearied out with their old superstitions, and sick of the burden and bondage of their priests, were ready and willing to embrace it. One of the most ancient fathers of the church, even Justin Martyr himself, expressly declares that they who lived according to the “law of nature, *were true christians.*” But in process of time the adulterated church perverted this doctrine of primitive simplicity, by strange and fraudulent inventions, to suit the corrupt views of the inventors, by which the minds of the people were subjugated and entangled

with another and worse yoke of bondage,—the intolerable mischiefs of an hireling priesthood; the abolition of which is indispensable to the happiness of the human race; for all history makes it plain, that clerical contentions, and the bitter animosities, and wars arising therefrom, have been the bane of society, and the pest of nations; causing unnatural strife in families, “making those of a man’s own household his foes.”

Would any reflecting person believe that the Spaniards ever could have been guilty of such monstrous cruelties and wickedness towards the simple and innocent natives of America, if such horrid butcheries had not been sanctioned and pompously set forth in the massacres of the bible, where a blood-thirsty robber,—a general of banditti, blasphemously declares that these crimes were done by command of the Almighty?*

• Proud of the protection of their Jehovah, the Jews marched forth to victory; heaven authorized 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.*

Mystery, miracle, and obscurity, never can be productive of virtue and knowledge, because they are the regions of imposture and ignorance, where reason and the light of nature are condemned;—in these dominions therefore, knaves only reign, and fools alone obey; for goodness, virtue, and knowledge, are not likely to be found in such company. The religion that is not natural is necessarily artificial, and is made up of delusive inventions, the pretended mysteries and inspirations of impostors; but truth being within (and not beyond) the boundaries of nature, needs not the support of *inspiration*, which is capable of as many deceptions as any impostor pleases, while he thrusts out truth to introduce falsehood in its room; sanctifying the greatest enormities as the will and wisdom of God, demolishing virtue, dethroning reason and setting up the most unnatural barbarities for the worship of the supreme power. This *inspiration* has also given birth to all saintly villainy, to religious lies, and lying wonders, made way for everything that is impious and false; for all that is scandalous of Almighty power, and pernicious to man.

In all the systems of religion that pretend to revelation (that is, all those of art), mystery is only another word for fraud; yet, in the hands of dexterous spiritual craftsmen, it becomes a formidable auxiliary, accounting

for everything that is rejected by common sense and experience, and claiming its full share of credit with any of the other religious dogmas, the disbelief of which consigns man to eternal perdition; but he who may be so easily damned out of his reason, may be damned into any belief or opinion; for nothing can be too monstrous for his pliable timidity, or too shocking to his easy credulity, if the terrors of damnation are properly held over him. In this manner are the light of nature and human judgment thrown down, and the authority of the priest set up in their place, and that authority must not be examined by reason, for if it be, reason will throw it down by a single flash of her torch. When all these things are duly considered, there arises a conviction that every hypothesis that is not founded in nature is absurd, and therefore cannot be the object of rational belief;—for nature is as it ever has been, and is ever likely to continue; so the only true religion can have no other foundation than nature, which never deceives; and the laws of omnipotence cannot be different, or if you please, cannot be less evident than nature's laws.

The Pentateuch, or the books attributed to Moses, are full of miracles and prodigies the most astonishing; but before those books were fabricated, which could not

possibly be before the restoration from Babylon by Cyrus, the Jews had been successively in slavery amongst five or six of the Pagan nations around them, and could not therefore be unacquainted with the fabulous legends of those countries; and accordingly we find the groundwork of many, if not of all their miraculous stories, in fabulous traditions of much higher antiquity.*

The unity of the Supreme Being was the secret of the

* All superstitions have resemblances and affinities. The heathens perceived in their religion circumstances conformable to, and which gave rise to those adopted in Christianity. They had miracles, 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; and especially we find many points of conformity between Esculapius and Jesus Christ. The heathen god was son of Apollo and the maid (or virgin) 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;—*Rondel on Superstition*.

initiated in the Egyptian mysteries of Isis (or Nature), and Moses being a priest of Isis, knew it as a matter of course, and made it the foundation of his scheme.

The story of the creation of the world in six days is taken from a fable that was famous amongst the Indians, Chaldeans, and other nations of the east, "who taught that God made the world in six periods, or gahambars, according to the ancient Zoroaster, who was so celebrated amongst the Persians." The learned maintain that, in the original Hebrew Talmud, the expression in the first verse of Genesis, is in the plural, viz., "the Gods made heaven and earth;" which is another proof of the falseness of our translation.

Their story about the first man seems to be taken from Apollodorus's fable of Prometheus, who made the first man and woman with clay, and afterwards animated them with fire, which he had stolen from the chariot of the sun, and thus imitated in Genesis, "breathed into their nostrils the breath of life."

The passage of the Red Sea by the Israelites is copied from the triumphant march of Bacchus, when from Egypt he went to conquer India, as the fable goes,—and the Arabian name of Bacchus, which, according to the learned Taylor, is *Mises*, has been, by a very slight disguise, converted into the Jewish name Moses.

Bacchus, in a jovial mood, drew wine from the rock by a stroke of his rod, but in this particular Moses does not imitate him, very wisely giving preference to water, rather than to wine, in a desert.

The miracle of the manna has long been detected and exposed; for Josephus tells us that in his time it was found in great quantities in Arabia, and the plant which produces it is now cultivated in Sicily and Southern Italy.

The trick of the Brazen Serpent was no doubt an invention which Moses had learnt of the Egyptian priests, a sort of automaton worked in a particular way so as to make the ignorant people believe that their diseases were cured by a miracle.

It was a part of military discipline amongst the Persians, Arabians, and other nations of the east, when marching large armies through the deserts, to carry in the van during the night, fires made with such combustible matter as would produce a great flame, which was elevated so high as to be distinctly seen by all in the rear, appearing as a "*pillar of fire*," pointing out and directing the line of march: sometimes these lights were elevated upon long poles near the General's tent, having at a distance the appearance of balls of fire:—and to show the line of march during the day, such com-

bustibles were burnt as would produce the greatest cloud, or "*pillar of smoke*." This military usage is mentioned both by Herodotus and Quintus Curtius; and Alexander himself adopted it from the Persians. This is a remarkable instance wherein the Jewish compilers, or fabricators, have, with a shameless effrontery that is altogether matchless, except by their own books, contrived to turn a common military usage into a miracle.

The story of Jephtha's sacrificing his daughter has every mark of being an imitation of the Greek tradition of Agamemnon's immolation of his daughter Iphigenia, in the famous expedition against Troy, which was taken by the Greeks full two hundred years before the Jews had either a country or writings of their own.

The exploits of Samson are borrowed from those of Hercules, and the imitation appears close and servile in the story of the gates of Gaza, as taken from that of Hercules and the pillars of Gadez, or Cadiz.*

* The Phœnicians related nearly the same exploits of their Hercules, (according to Varro, there were no less than forty-four Herculeses) as the Jews relate of Samson in the book of Judges; and as lion-killing was common to both, the Jew, as usual, far exceeding the other in the hyperbole; we may reasonably conclude that the Jewish Samson was only an imitation of the Phœnician giant.—*See Isaac Vossius.*

+ The shocking tale of slaying all the eldest male children of Egypt seems to be taken from the historical fact that the seventh Ptolemy caused all the young men of Alexandria to be murdered; and if this be the foundation of the story, it adds another proof that the Pentateuch is anything but an ancient book.

The fable of Arion on the dolphin's back has served for the ground work of the monstrously absurd tale of Jonah and the whale. The former is pretty and amusing enough as a fiction, but its recoinage in the Jewish mint has given it all the features of the most barbarous ignorance.

+ There are several floods mentioned in the Pagan legends, such as the Egyptian inundation of Prometheus, the Grecian floods of Ogyges and Deucalion, from some one of which has sprung the Jewish story of Noah. The three former were only partial floods, deluging a few low countries, whereas the ridiculous boldness of the Jewish hyperbolist deluges the whole earth, although he could not know that the American Continent existed:—the Grecian floods were of such antiquity that writers mention them only as traditional stories handed down from the remotest ages. The Egyptians and Greeks having thus their ancient floods as monuments of antiquity, why should not the Jews

get up one also, when they had become a petty nation, so they borrowed from the legend of Deucalion, imitating in detail almost every circumstance, as we have it related in the Syrian Goddess of Lucian; but the narrator, in order to conceal the identity of the stories, must make a change of names, by putting Noah, or Noe, in place of Deucalion, which suited his purpose. The Chaldeans, either admitting the Grecian floods, or claiming the honor of having one of their own, from some great overflowing of the Euphrates, called their pilot by the name of Noe, a name no doubt familiar to the Jews when they were slaves to the Babylonians, and hence their name of Noah, which is nearly the same as Noē, in sound.

The writer of Genesis, after the eating of the apple, and the expulsion of the destitute couple from the delicious abodes of Paradise, places cherubim, or angels, as centinels at the doors of the garden, armed with flaming two-handed swords, lest the forlorn wanderers should attempt, by stratagem or force, to regain the apple tree, and their happy mansions. This appears to be a close imitation of the ancient fable of the poets, who placed a terrible dragon to guard the golden apples of the Hesperides. If the angelical guard of Eden was kept up until the flood (as some of the saints have

supposed) without the usual relief of centinels, the poor angels must have been on duty sixteen hundred and fifty years !!!

If Amphion, by the music of his flute alone, caused the stones to rise spontaneously, and place themselves so as to form the walls of Thebes, why should not Joshua reverse the miracle, by tumbling down the walls of Jericho, merely by the sound of trumpets?

The miracle of the hermaphrodite created in Genesis, 1st c., 27th v., had not, we may presume, been found to answer the end that is so pointedly recommended in the 28th v., and, therefore, another miracle became necessary in converting one of Adam's ribs into a more suitable helpmate, who was not intended to partake of both sexes, but to be purely feminine (c. 2, v. 22), which was no doubt more agreeable to our first parent, as it gave him FAIRER means of fulfilling the injunction laid in the first part of the 28th verse, to 'multiply and replenish the earth.' [But in regard to the question that has been started—namely, which of the two shall rise with this rib at the resurrection, or which of them shall then be best entitled to it—I shall not pretend to judge; but certain it is, that English lawyers would make an excellent thing out of such a case in Chancery.] A story something like the above about Adam, is to be found in

the Symposium of Plato, where the first man, according to him, was named 'Androginus, who was afterwards divided into two parts, male and female.'*

Romulus and Remus had a god for their father, and a virgin for their mother ;—Christianity has similar cases.

Heres spent a couple of weeks in hell, and afterwards came back to the earth,—Esculapius raised Hyppolitus

* In the Iranian, or ancient Persian manuscripts, there are two distinct stories about the creation of man, and from which those of Genesis appear to be taken ; but the compiler, not knowing which of the accounts to prefer, has very foolishly mingled them together, yet still leaving the two creations we find in Genesis. In chapter 1, God (in the original it is in the plural, *Elohim*, or the *Gods*) is said to have created man out of nothing ; and on this first creation there were no restrictions whatsoever imposed upon them as to what they should eat. 'Behold,' said God, '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 food.' But to Adam of the second creation (chapter 2) God 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 out of nothing at the same moment, male and female, or an individual possessing both sexes ; which, probably, was found not to answer ; and therefore, in the second creation, God said, 'Let us make a helper like unto himself ;' and to effect this, God sent a deep sleep upon Adam, and while he slept God took one of his ribs, and closed up its place with flesh, and of this rib a companion was made for this *second first* man, who was called *Adam*, which signifies clay, or red earth.

from the dead,—Hercules saved Alcestes from the hand of death ;—Christianity has parallel miracles.

Nearly all of the above are so many instances wherein the Jewish compilers of the Pentateuch have copied from the mythological fables, or the traditions of paganism ; and it is very remarkable that, whatever might be the nature of the story or legend thus imitated, these compilers have never failed to render that which in the original was lively and amusing, into what is now deformed and hideous, in a manner that is perfectly characteristic of their own semi-savage condition. The story of Joseph may be quoted as an exception to the above observation ; and it is truly strange that we should have it through them in such affecting simplicity ; but the impartial amongst the learned are agreed that it certainly is not Jewish, and that in the Pentateuch it is given almost literally as it stands in the Arabian original ; but they say that the same justice has not been done to the book of Job, taken from the Arabian also.

All our divines who call themselves orthodox seem to agree in declaring that God is infinite ; and yet they assert, at the same time, that there are other beings and existences besides him whom they have asserted to be infinite, which appears to be a contradiction in terms ; but the wiser sort of the ancient pagans reasoned with

much more consistency when they maintained that God made all things of nothing—*but himself*, whom they held to be infinite, and therefore their denial of the existence of any other thing besides him necessarily followed ; for, said they, if anything else besides him exists, he cannot be infinite, but only co-existent with other things.

END OF LECTURE THE FIRST.

LECTURE II.

Our superstitions with our life begin,
Th' obscene old grand-dam, or the next of kin.

PERSIUS.

'Every wonder has a veil.'

ON MIRACLES AND OTHER SUPERNATURALS.

“ANOTHER true foundation can no man lay than that which God has ever laid in nature.”

There is a famous sect amongst the Mahometans in Turkey, noted for their wisdom and strong reasoning powers, who maintain that “the great power never has, and never can discover itself, with any certainty, in any other way than by speaking to the reason and understanding of men; for if we depend, say they, on oral tradition, we lay ourselves open to the greatest falsities and impositions, there being nothing so liable to endless changes and alterations. Numberless mistakes, additions,

and subtractions, according as men's opinions vary by the change of times and circumstances. Nor are books more exempt from such doubtfulness and uncertainty; since we find so much disagreement and contradiction among books written by different men, in different countries, and in different ages, and even among the varying books written by the same men. The only sure way then, say they, is to consult reason, as it comes from nature,* or God; live just and honest lives; be kind and beneficent to our fellow creatures."

All attempts to set aside, or to render the laws of nature useless and ineffectual, are in the highest degree pernicious to man, and a supernatural religion is the main-spring of all such evils; for that religion only can be true which is reasonable and convincing to all men; and if it be not generally held, that is a proof that it is not convincing. But how few people there are in a nation who take the pains to consider the bottom of any religion!! Whatever is established will attract the

* It is true, reason is not sufficient to bring us to a perfect knowledge of all things; but it is able to furnish us with enough to make us happy, and that is as much as we need care for; and, as it is the supreme and primitive director of every man, to infringe its liberty of directing is to invade the common charter of nature, and every man's right and property; so that those who do so, are justly to be looked on as the enemies of the human race.

million, who never inquire beyond it, and the thinking few who believe it not, afford a proof positive that the evidence for it is not strong enough to make them believe. And with regard to books of any sort, whether they go by the imposing names of Scriptures or Gospels, if found inconsistent with natural religion, and with eternal reason—which, being the offspring of truth, never varies—then let them be at once rejected, that we may free ourselves from those absurdities which the folly or the knavery of men has introduced, in opposition to the only unerring guides of human conduct.

“For zeal, fanatic zeal, once wedded fast
To some dear falsehood, hugs it to the last.”

“The Athenians of old, even long before the time of Solon, had a prophetic and mysterious book, called in their language the Testament, on which they pretended the safety of the republic depended. This work of darkness appears to have been of the same nature as the books of the sybils at Rome, to which also the destiny of the nation was attached, at least so pretended the priests and pontiffs of both nations, and the more such gross impostures were impressed on the minds of their victims, the people, the more easily did the politicians and theologians united, gain their objects. Yet there

was this difference, that, according to Roman history, the books of the sybils were always produced, while at Athens the Testament was buried in the same artful silence as the mysteries of Ceres or Eleusis. Dicearchus mentions this Testament in his harangue against Demosthenes, whom he accuses of having failed in respect towards this ineffable volume, which contained, as the learned say, nothing but a collection of pretended miracles and predictions by two noted Grecian impostors, named Bacis and Antiphylus."

If such books, instead of being veiled with impenetrable clouds, had been examined by the rules of criticism, it would have appeared that the sybilline books of Rome were only an imitation of the Athenian Testament, fitted up to suit the paganism of the Latins.

"The most dangerous superstitions of the Greeks were precisely those which brought money both to the priests and to the states ; for the Athenians protected the mysteries of Ceres and of Eleusis, for no other reason than because they had a moiety of the profits from the hierophants, or priests. When Diagoras of Melos afterwards maintained openly that those ceremonies were contrary to virtue, and corrupted the manners of the Greeks, no person could, nor even endeavoured to confute him ; but the priests secretly offered an attic

talent to whoever would take away his life." "Such was to be the reward of Diagoras ; for even in those days the theologists reasoned with poniards and burning fagots, instead of the ordinary rules of logic, which they confessed were not made for them."

There is nothing more to be feared than the plain fact, that the hireling priests in all religions cannot possibly have an interest in leading men to opinions that are true, but to such opinions only as they have enlisted themselves to profess ; and he that believes and vindicates things that are false, in as much as they are contrary to nature and reason, is an enemy to truth. He that believes and justifies what is dishonourable to God, and pernicious to reason and right action, embraces impious and unjust principles, and when these are put into practice he is unrighteous in fact. Nor should we stifle in silence the truths we have discovered, for we must either vindicate the liberty of truth, or submit to the slavery of error ; and believing without seeing, that is, without evidence, is nonsense and absurdity. But, on the contrary, fanatics see nothing but what is invisible, and believe nothing but what is incredible.

Deists and other lovers of truth think it reasonable that, as those histories containing relations of miracles and other supernaturals, relate more improbable, and

much more incredible things than other histories, they ought to bring with them more substantial proofs than other histories, to confirm the truth of such prodigies as they relate, or else, that every relation in them which is not as probable as other true history, should stand for nought: for why should we (say they) believe on the bare report of unknown reporters, things naturally impossible, or out of the range of experience, because they are generally believed by those who never made any inquiry?*

Many believers have no disposition, others no capacity to examine rightly;—besides when creeds and principles are fixed by authority as being the only right and allowable, it discourages all examination; and throughout all the systems of pretended revelation, they are fixed and established for that end alone, lest men should see differently from those who mislead them.

Fraud and force will always be unavoidable in supporting the inconsistent belief, that things which have no

* Should we not—*ought* we not, as thinking beings, naturally to wish to satisfy our understandings of the wisdom of these asserted ways of providence, instead of silently letting them rest on the unquestioned ground on which imposture ever seeks to entrench itself? Do not truth, liberty, and virtue, court inquiry as much, and with as just right and reason, as tyranny? Dogmatism and falsehood insist on substituting for it blind implicit faith and obedience.

foundation in nature and reason, are necessary parts of religion; and the histories of all churches exhibit continued scenes of villany for upholding such inventions; and truth, with all her willingness to come to light, is kept in the back ground; for the more that a man is endowed with good sense, natural piety, and virtue, the more he is secretly hated as a dangerous enemy to the priestly order.

The universality of superstition is owned and confirmed in effect, by each distinct sect, in declaring that it has crept into all other sects, (their own always excepted), the respective teachers of whom find their interest in promoting it. Nor is it possible to be otherwise, so long as men are taught to build their religion upon an artificial, and less extended foundation than that on which religion has been laid by the Universal Being of nature. And to suppose any thing can be true from revelation that is evidently false by reason, is to undermine the revelation of nature; because nothing unreasonable, nay, which is not highly reasonable, can come from that all ruling power of eternal reason.

The irreconcilable enemies of rational religion, perceiving it to be too gross, in the present dawn of the light of nature, to attack it openly as such, do it covertly under the names of infidelity, atheism, &c.—trusting that

the times of ignorance and fanaticism will return, when the ghastly incubus of false zeal shall again brood over the grovelling laity, stifling every natural conception of their minds, as being the suggestions of the devil; particularly if they clash with the interests, the real or pretended opinions of their priests.

No system of revealed religion ever was, nor ever can be made known to all men, therefore no revealed religion can be necessary; for a rule that is not generally known cannot be generally obeyed; and since all these superstitions differ widely from, and are indeed opposed to each other, and you cannot prove one of them to be truer than the rest before you can prove that one of them is true: all of them have had similar mysteries and miracles, and if such things are sacred only because they are secret, expose them, and the witchcraft is at an end, the spell is broken, and the charm has lost its force; it is but varnish that appears, and nothing of the splendid pomp remains but shreds and rottenness. The more intrinsic worth a thing has, the better will it bear investigation; but fraud and its usual saintly train are the fruits and friends of darkness; so the religion that will not bear examination is the kingdom of darkness, whereas truth, if not prevented, will always court the light that it may be manifest. But it is not intended to

be seen wherever mystery and miracle are resorted to,—like wisdom, it delights to appear in public, it loves freedom, openness, and plain dealing; but the mansion of mystery is the pride of ignorance, the delusion of madmen and fools, where enthusiasm is born, and the prophetic visions of future events are brought forth,—where bigots and fanatics are trained,—where the voice of reason is stopt, and inquiry is confounded,—and where superstition, like fire, resolves everything into itself.*

Man proudly assumes that he is the only creature that has a knowledge of God, and if it be so, he is the only animal that sins against God, whom he professes

* 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 generality 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 a 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.—“*The System of Nature.*”

to know; for no one amongst the brute creatures ever did a thing so bad as he does, when, for a few pence per day, he hires himself to kill in foreign wars men who never did him any wrong. Birds never quarrel with each other except for things necessary to their nature, such as food and females; but men, instigated by preternatural chimeras, with which they ought to have no concern, destroy one another. If men really knew that the only thing necessary to be known in regard to God and religion, is principally that of their duty towards each other, in their different stations in life, they would not be so easily deceived, and deterred from exercising their reasoning faculties by theological terrors, which inculcate the fear of death, owing, as it is said, to the dubious fate of the vital spark afterwards; for the assertions of divines about a very small number of souls in the beatitude of celestial joys, and the vast majority of others in infernal agonies,* is as hard to prove as the existence of the river Styx, the Acheron, or the Elysian

* There was not anything, however ridiculous and absurd, that the superstitious villany of the priests could not introduce;—they declared that the supreme power would suffer a declared enemy so far to prevail against him, that when he wished to save all mankind, this enemy, or devil, would so far overrule, that through his instigation a thousand men would be damned for every one that is saved!

fields of pagan mythology. The more rational belief, therefore is, that as thought and sensibility are the consequence of a particular organization of a portion of matter, it follows that when that organization ceases, the conjunction of those parts is dissolved, and the MAN is no more; the vital part, or what is called the soul, being the requisite compound of air and fire, which rejoin their own elements, and although the MAN is annihilated, the different elements which composed his body and mind are eternal. This opinion is agreeable to that of one of the earliest fathers of the Latin church, Tertullian, who cries out, "O man, think what thou wast before created, for if anything, thou couldst not but remember it! Thou then that wast nothing before thy creation, shall, when thou ceasest to live, again return to nothing."

As all Nature's laws are just and necessary,* she requires nothing of us that ought to excite either fear or the idea of severity, she being as much in her course when men and other animals die, as when she organizes them into life; but if men were taught to have no fear of death, where then would be the pride, the power, and the profit, that now arise from mysteries and super-

* Even Tertullian himself says, "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*."

naturals? The idle fears of eternal punishments would fall into the ridicule they deserve; the assuming arrogance of the mystagogues of the church would be laid low with all their pageantry and ceremonies, and men would have veneration only for truth and wisdom, with the moral virtues in their train; and as they no longer imbibed those mischievous principles which have never failed to set the world at variance, so no fiery persecuting zeal would be required for their maintenance; and the harmony of good will and social virtue would unite men peacefully in society.

It is true, that in these latter enlightened ages, the church has not been able to maintain its absurd pretensions to miracles: but that does not hinder the priests from still upholding the reality of those of antiquity, with the use of which, together with their other machinery of inspiration, mystery, and prophesy, they are enabled to carry on their trade in as flourishing a manner as ever it was at any former period; but the dreadful charge of supporting such numbers of men as are now in pay to maintain impositions, is a cruel burden upon the industrious portion of society, which was never felt in pagan antiquity,* or even in the earliest

* According to the mythology of the ancients, their theogony consisted of fully thirty thousand, including both bearded and

time of christianity ; for the revenues now belonging to the different orders of priests, monks, and friars, in popish countries, and the dignitaries of our own church, are a greater tax on labouring man, and have introduced a greater degree of poverty, than has ever been occasioned by any lay-tyrants, or conquerors : for the latter have been contented with temporary plunder only, without concerning themselves how to find out ways and means to prey upon mankind for ever. The charge alone, therefore, of supporting so vast a number of ecclesiastics, is a great and melancholy evil in society, even if they were employed in the most innocent manner, in mere eating and drinking ; but this, unhappily, is not the case, for as the peace and good order of human society consist in the practice of moral duties, every diversion of the mind from this proper object, to other concerns of a hurtful tendency, or at least, of no practical utility, must abate men's zeal in the observance

unbearded divinities. We have reduced that establishment to three only ; but nevertheless, and unaccountable as it may appear, it has been so contrived by our modern hierophants, that on earth the service of these three, together with their train of deputies and saints, holy-days, &c., has entailed upon human industry a tax of an hundred times the amount per annum of that which was contributed yearly to regale the nasal senses of all the celestial army of antiquity.

and discharge of the moral duties, and consequently, prejudice the peace and general good of society.

Ambition, political tyranny, revenge, and covetousness, have in all ages more or less plagued the world, and been the source of great disorders; but a blind zeal to impose preternatural speculations has not only had the same effects as these evils, but has carried men to a pitch of wickedness, which otherwise, "eye had not seen, nor ear heard, nor had entered into the heart of man to conceive;" for what ancient or modern history can parallel the malign brutality of religious fanatics? The most irregular of our passions decay with time, and their mischievous effects are restrained by common sense, and the policy of society; and there are in us some good passions, or natural feelings of the heart, such as compassion, good nature, and humanity, which when left free, serve tolerably well to equilibrate human conduct; but that furious zeal which flows from religious systems of pretended revelation, gathers strength with time, bears down all those rational and useful lessons which we derive from the light of nature, overleaping the bounds of the material and animal world, and subduing all the tender passions.

But of all the supernatural engines of mischief that have ever been played off upon poor deluded man,

reason has perhaps had the most powerful adversary in the invention of heavenly inspiration, for it is ever in readiness as a salvo, to smooth down, and account for whatever is rejected by reason and experience, however absurd or unsightly : and upon it also is artfully founded all legitimate authority against human understanding, simply on its being asserted, (by whom, where, or when, we know not) that there *have been* some men so divinely taught of God, that to question their fidelity, or doubt their veracity, or not indubitably to receive their tales, is, they say, to call to account God himself, because their affirmations are stamped with what they declare to be the divine impression ; thus their delusions are sanctioned, and hence arises the power of the church to overawe men into a *prescribed* belief, without daring to make any inquiry ; but let men only learn to treat the grave malediction of the priest, when he denounces damnation, in the way that it deserves, that is, with perfect scorn and contempt ; then, and then only, will the honest world begin to see that they have as much right to judge of these matters as of anything else.

The voice of truth, being nothing else than the language of nature, is plain and easy, soft and harmonious, the source of all wisdom for informing the head, and of all virtue in reforming the heart ; no schisms can

ever proceed from that fountain of perfect consistency and rectitude, which never can give birth to contention, or plans of imperious ambition, for the subjugation of the human mind. But, on the other hand, christianity is now become a trade of gain, (godliness is a great gain, saith the scripture),* a regular scheme of dominion, and a school of contention; the pure and simple system which its reputed founder taught, is now the severest satire in the world against the priestcraft of the present day. It is true, that in these times the church cannot so easily indulge its propensity to set fire to people, as it did in former ages, but if Jesus had, by means of a miracle similar to some of those ascribed to him, revisited the earth about the fourteenth century of his own era, and preached the same system of nature that he formerly did, he would most assuredly have been put to death; but previous to a second catastrophe in this way, we may suppose some catholic priest, with more good nature and humanity, than is common in the order, to have addressed him in this manner:—"My good

* "We know from no less an authority than documents laid on the table of the House of Commons some years ago, that we christians not only make a traffic in our own religion in India, but in that of the Pagans also, by actually compelling the natives to pay a tax for admission to their own temples, to worship the Idol Jaggernaut!"

friend, you cannot but remember that your countrymen, the Jews, crucified you for exposing the folly of their superstitions and idle ceremonies, and that the mild and tolerant government of the Romans could not save you ; but if on this occasion you will listen to good advice, you may make your fortune, and be no longer under the necessity of working as a carpenter, or in danger from violence a second time ; for know that of your scheme of natural religion and good morals, not a single vestige remains, save the name alone ; but upon that name, we have contrived to raise the most ambitious system of grandeur, riches, power, and dominion, that was ever devised by the head of man ; and with a degree of success at which you will be astonished, when I tell you, that we have done all this merely by reversing the principles which you strove to establish : for you judged too favourably of human nature, when you supposed that the simple religion of deism, together with governments founded upon principles of pure ethics, would serve to guide the great mass of mankind ; and the strongest proof of your ignorance appears in our having established a system, by strictly inverting every principle of yours ; only by calling in to our aid as much machinery from the Pagan mythology, as suited our purpose ; such as mystery, miracle, and prophesy, using all our art

to foster as much ignorance as possible, that being an indispensable ingredient in our mixture; and to strengthen the above, we add the terrors of eternal perdition to all who oppose, or do not believe us. These are the only proper nostrums for the bulk of mankind; therefore, I say again, be wise for the future,—become one of us, and you are sure of a Bishopric, on the first vacancy.”

After this address we may easily conceive what would be the reply of the virtuous moralist, using his former words,—“O ye generation of vipers, ye have made use of my name to enslave the human mind, which I endeavoured to set free. I revered nature, truth, and reason, as my pole-stars, in everything; ye have subverted these unerring guides to the utmost of your power, and on the ruins thereof have ye raised the empire of hypocrisy and superstitious delusion ye have just described! And being thus arrived at the highest summit of human grandeur and power, wallowing in riches and luxury, maintained by the earnings of the industrious but credulous people, ye have held over their weak minds the terrors of an imaginary futurity which I never taught, grossly deceiving and abusing them in my name, impiously ascribing to me, at the same time, miracles and other prodigies which I never wrought, and which are

equally false and abhorrent in the ways of the almighty power. “Ye are not my followers, but the followers of that wild and inconsistent visionary Saul, or Paul, who in my name taught unintelligible dogmas, and absurd reveries about my deification, and upon which false foundation ye have raised your present boasted edifice of superstitious grandeur. I taught my followers to be like sheep among wolves, but ye are wolves among sheep.”

In descending from the miracles of antiquity, down to those attributed to the early Christians, we are told by Lucian, Celsus, Julian, and others, that these seeming prodigies were performed by crafty jugglers, expert at their trade,—miracle-mongers by profession. Celsus represents all the Christian wonder-workers as mere vagabonds and common cheats, “who rambled about to fairs and markets; not in the circles of the wiser or better sort, for among such they never ventured to appear; but where they saw a set of raw young fellows, slaves, or fools, here they obtruded themselves, and practised all their arts of deception.” Cæcilius calls them a “lurking nation, shunning the light; mute in public—prating in corners.” The charge of fraud and imposture was constantly urged against them by their opponents, and with good reason, as their constant pretension was

to the command of supernatural power. Did they ever exhibit their miracles amongst the learned, intelligent, or higher ranks of the people? No. To whom then? To the lowest classes, to the uninformed, weak, and ignorant only. What were those miracles? Such only as might easily be counterfeited, when aided by collusion,—casting out what they called devils, healing the sick, lame, blind, and causing those to speak who pretend to be dumb.*

The most notorious, and withal the most accomplished, of all those vagabond quacks in theology, appears to have

* Miracles 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,—things incredible are here adduced in proof of incredible things. Almost all impostors who have fabricated religions, have announced incredibilities to mankind; and 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 which you cannot comprehend.” Truth is simple and evident; the marvellous is ever to be suspected. Nature is always true to herself; she acts by invariable 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.—*Christianity Unveiled.*

been Saul, alias Paul, of saintly memory, and a wholesale manufacturer of miracle, mystery, and quibble. The most probable account we have of this man is in the Acts of the Ebionites, who tell us that he was not originally a Jew, but a Gentile, or Pagan proselyte, whose itinerant propensities led him to Jerusalem, where he was employed as a menial servant by Gamaliel, who was then the high priest of the Jews. Here his active and overbearing disposition soon distinguished itself in ferreting out, and running down, the new sect of Galileans, or Christians, the better to ingratiate himself with the high priest, to whose daughter he had impudence enough to have pretensions in marriage; and for that purpose he submitted to the operation of circumcision. But his circumcision availed him nothing, and he might well ask, as he does in Romans, chap. 3rd, verse 1st, “*what profit is there of circumcision?*” for both the young lady and her father were sadly against the match. Nor was this aversion on the part of the daughter to be wondered at, if we consider the personal description given of him by Lucian and others, viz. that he was bald headed, short in stature, hook nosed, bandy legged, with a fierce forbidding look. Thus repulsed in his views of marriage, he wreaked his revenge on Gamaliel;—saw visions from heaven, “brighter than the sun at noon-

day," left his master the high priest, and went over to the Galileans. It is not necessary to say much about the three varying accounts he gives of himself in the Acts of the Apostles, but these inconsistent statements verify the old adage, that those who depart from the truth ought to have good memories. Having been driven out of Antioch in Phrygia (Acts, chap. 13th) for his malpractices, he proceeded to the town of Iconium (Acts, chap. 14th) where the fathers say he made a *convert* of St Thecla, the first female martyr. She had been contracted to Thamirus, a man handsome, rich, noble, and of the first rank in the city; but Paul having *converted* her, she renounced her marriage to embrace VIRGINITY. Enraged at this seduction, Thamirus complained thereof to the Roman pro-consul, Sextilius, who caused the saint to be scourged, and driven out of the city. From thence he went to Lystra, where he played one of his juggling tricks by collusion, causing a cripple to walk; but being followed by some Jews who had seen his legerdemain at Antioch and Iconium, he was detected by them, and the miracle of the cripple ended in his saintship being cast out of the city, stoned, and left for dead. Soon after this he returned to Antioch, and here the fathers tell us he was joined by his convert Thecla, who, as a matter of course, would be abandoned by her rela-

tions; but with Paul she had no doubt a very proper asylum for the preservation of her chastity, for where could it be so safe as in the keeping of a saint? Good repute is not much cared for, in the wanderings of female adventurers, especially in those who follow vagrant preachers. The saint was again flogged at Thyatira, for his old habit of tampering with the women; and practising the same sly custom again at Thessalonica, the same reward was prepared for him, but he was concealed by his friend Jason, and sent from thence in the night (Acts 17th, verse 10th) to Bera, or Berea, from which place he soon absconded likewise, being afraid of another flogging, leaving behind him in that town his companions, Silas and Timotheus, who were less obnoxious than himself, probably from having less of the *libido, dinis*, in them. At Ephesus his outrageous conduct would in all likelihood have cost him his life, and some of his companions were caught, but he himself escaped into Macedonia, not choosing to abide the mode of trial that was recommended by the town clerk. It is certain that although Paul abounded in miracles to benefit others, yet the poor fellow could not perform a single one to save himself, or his companions, even when they stood most in need of them; nor could he preach himself out of bonds. In his Second Epistle to the Corinthians

(chap. 11th) he tells us that the Jews flogged him five times, and that each time he received thirty-nine lashes; that he was thrice beaten with rods, and once stoned, punishments which were then commonly inflicted on such turbulent and seditious demagogues. But the astonishing part of the matter is, his success in causing a vast majority of the Christian world to believe that he never outraged the peace of society, nor committed any crimes to deserve those chastisements. He tells us farther, that he had been "a night and a day in the deep," which showed a laudable ambition not to be outdone by Jonah and his whale, but he does not tell us how he found himself after such a ducking.* The above are a few sketches of the true character and conduct of a vagrant, unruly mystagogue, who, nevertheless, has commanded the faith and veneration of those called true believers (that is, all who believe whatever has been taught them in childhood) for more than sixteen centuries!!!

After venturing so far to take a peep into the holy of holies, to examine the great arcanum of priestcraft, it

* He himself tells us that he was ravished up to the third heaven; but why this ravishment,—for what good end was he forced thither, and what did he learn by this miraculous journey? "THINGS UNSPEAKABLE, WHICH NO MAN COULD COMPREHEND." This is your grandest flight, O, Paul! but you forget to tell us what advantage we are to derive from these UNSPEAKABLES.

may not be improper to digress a little in giving a dissection of another special character, which has long been impiously held up by priests and their ignorant followers, as being the man according to God's own heart. Now, the Hebrew historian relates that this man, David, "collected about six hundred vagabonds, overwhelmed with debts and crimes, and at the head of these banditti, pillaged his countrymen. After these robberies he resolved to destroy Nabal and his whole family, because he refused to pay contributions to him. He hired out his services as a mercenary to King Achish, the enemy of his country, and soon afterwards betrays this Achish, notwithstanding his kindness to him, which he requites by sacking the villages in alliance with that king, massacring every human being, including even infants at the breast, that no one might be found at a future day to give testimony of his depredations; as if an infant could have possibly disclosed his villany! Another exploit of his was to destroy all the inhabitants of some other villages, under saws, and harrows, and axes, and by burning them in brick-kilns. His ambition now aspires to the top of the ladder, and he wrests the throne from Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, by an act of perfidy, which he follows up by despoiling of his property, and afterwards putting to death, Mephibosheth, the son of Saul, *and brother*

of his own peculiar friend and generous protector Jonathan; he has also the horrible wickedness to deliver up to the Gibeonites, another son of Saul, and five of his grandsons, who perished by the gallows!!! After these crimes we need hardly notice his numerous concubines, his intrigue with Bathsheba, or the murder of her husband Uriah."

The veneration in which such characters have long been, and are still held by folly and ignorance, shows that superstition is a mad error; it exalts the unworthy and profligate, it fears those who deserve to be loved, and it injures whatever it worships: and how, indeed, can it be expected that the same evil which has in all ages, and in all countries, been hurtful to truth and true religion, should in any age become the guardian of them?

That the church should have particular respect and veneration for this St Paul, is not at all surprising, since he has furnished out a greater number of mysterious nothings, or nonsensical quibbles, than any other of the contributors to the writing of the New Testament; and as his Gospel formed an excellent foundation for theological power and corruption, it is eminently esteemed; whilst that of Barnabas, which seems to have been one of moral simplicity, has been suppressed, and declared

to be apocryphal, because it did not favour clerical greatness. It is said, however, to be held in respect by the Mahometans, who, after making such interpolations as suited their own superstition, found that Mahomet was expressly the promised paraclet, or comforter, there mentioned; and that the said Gospel of Barnabas was the only true one amongst the many hundreds of Gospels, Epistles, Acts, and Revelations of the Christians.

If Paul was not the first, he certainly must have been amongst the very first who corrupted and metamorphosed the system of Jesus from its original principles of natural light and simplicity; the strongest proof of which we find in his quarrels with Barnabas, James and Peter, who directly charge him with this perversion; and Peter, in a letter to James, which is quoted by Cotelierius, and prefixed by him to the Clementines, complains that his true and legal preaching had been rejected amongst the Gentiles, “who had embraced *the trifling and lawless doctrine* of a man who was his enemy.” Now this could allude to no one else than Paul, who was both the apostle of the Gentiles, and the enemy of Peter.

That Talmud, which was composed by the Jews of Mesopotamia, about the fifth century, relates that there have been many Christians who, after comparing the

miracles of the Old Testament with those of the New, embraced Judaism, considering it impossible that the Sovereign Lord of nature should have wrought such stupendous prodigies for a religion which he intended to annihilate. What impious inconsistency! exclaimed they, in supposing that the Almighty power should, for a series of ages, have exhibited a train of the most amazing miracles in favour of a *true* religion that was soon to become a *false* one that!—he would send his own Son, who is declared to be no other than himself, to make that untrue and nugatory, which he took so many ages to erect and establish!

One of the Talmuds makes the Almighty gather together his celestial army in the reign of Ahab, and he asks the spirits, “Who amongst you will go and deceive Ahab, and persuade him to go up to war against Ramoth Gilead?” and there came forth a lying spirit, and stood before the Lord and said, “I will persuade him.” Here we have a lying angel, and God Almighty himself prompting to a falsehood, or endeavouring to deceive. The belief of such impious absurdities is alone sufficient to show that the credulity of man has no bounds whatever; that it is even greater than anything which his mind can possibly conceive.

In another Lecture it has already been observed, that

as the reputed founder of Christianity was a follower of nature, and a preacher of good morals, it is inconsistent to suppose that he even believed in miracles ; but on the contrary, his earnest intention was to reclaim his countrymen, the Jews, from all such absurd perversions of reason and common sense. It does not anywhere appear that he himself wrote anything ; and it was not until near two hundred years after the time of his death, that some obscure pretended followers, using his name, produced the books containing the alleged miracles. And as the church grew strong in wealth and power, these books have been altered and interpolated, at the will and pleasure of the early fathers, to suit their own, and the general interests of the church ; for, however strange it may appear, it is a well-ascertained fact that they were frequently engaged in altering, remodelling, and fitting up their GOSPELS, that is, settling what should be, and what should not be, the word of God!!! Tithes, and all other temporal benefits that served to promote the riches and power of the clergy, *always formed part of the word of God.**

* What is called *the word of God*, can have no intelligible meaning, unless it is taken metaphorically to signify the order or course of nature, because it follows and depends upon the immutable and eternal laws of nature.

It is recorded by Victor of Tunis, an African bishop, and the same is also stated by Scaliger, that a *general alteration of the four Gospels* took place in the sixth century, by command of the Emperor Anastasius, as follows:—"That the holy Gospels, as written, IDIOTIS EVANGELISTIS, are to be corrected and amended."

Mahomet expressly declares that he wrought no miracles; but exactly as in the case of Christianity, his less judicious followers make him work many of a very astonishing description; and many Christians, prompted by a false zeal against him, accuse him of boasting of certain miracles which the Arabian writers never attributed to him. His accusers even go so far as to say that when he made his rapid journey to visit all the heavens in a single night, he was mounted on the mysterious mare Borak, which he had borrowed from his friend, the archangel Gabriel, (making good the old proverb, that a borrowed horse goes far), and that he was so ungrateful as not to return the mare, but kept her for his own stud.

One error naturally leads to another, and the art of drawing dogmas, or infallible conclusions from false foundations, which never can be allowed by truth and reason, has ever been one of the principal strong-holds of theology, which, in endeavouring to support its favourite

assertion of the creation of matter, rushes headlong into a greater difficulty, (if that be possible), for having no material to work with, it is forced into the palpable absurdity of creating matter out of nothing. The superficial reasoner cries out, "This clock did not make itself, it had an artificer, and therefore matter must have had a creator and artificer also."—"Very true, my friend, your clock did not always exist as a clock, but most assuredly the matter of which it is composed did always exist, and ever will exist in some form or other, and has undergone thousands of millions of different modes and states of being, before nature produced the particular substances of wood and metal of which it is composed."

One of the fatal errors impressed upon the mind of man in early youth, is the folly of measuring the Almighty power, and the endless resources and changes of nature, by his own poor, weak, and perverted understanding; always taking a distorted or mistaken view of her common process in the dissolution, decomposition, and the separation of the elementary particles of bodies, for the entire and radical annihilation of them, which, if true, would indeed be a miracle. It is therefore not repugnant to reason, or contrary to what appears from experience to be the universal order of things, to acknowledge

that matter is self-existent, self-ruled, and self-modified by *motion*, which is co-eternal with its own nature, and may be said to be its *executive*, or energetic power; and that the annihilation of any part of it, even by its own power, which cannot be subject to control, is utterly impossible; and as there can be no such thing as the organization or production of animal life without motion, so is it equally necessary in the death and decomposition of every creature that has life; in all which process nature is pursuing her own invariable course of perpetual change into new modifications of matter; but utterly denying, by her immutable laws, that any man, or other animal that has once been dead in reality, did ever come to life again, although it is quite in the process of nature that dead animals (the dissolution of gross bodies being wrought by fermentation) should give rise to other and very different organizations both animal and vegetable.

A power to work miracles would be superior, and external to, the universal and immanent laws by which the systems of things are governed; and exists nowhere but in the fantastic imagination of man, being directly contrary to the attributes of Almighty power,—to that which is the most clear of all others, its unchangeableness; and the more men are amused with miraculous

tales, the more will they be diverted from exercising their reason. But when truth is valued, the rational faculties will be freely used, and superstition will inevitably sink, with fanaticism its offspring. The more respect that is paid to anything substituted in the room of truth and moral righteousness, the less will these be practised and regarded; and whenever the resurrection and prevalence of these shall take place, the death-blow is given to the false righteousness of faith, and all preternatural religions.

The infinite number of pretenders in all ages to revelations from heaven,* supported by miracles, and the perpetual introduction of new notions of the Deity, new

* 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 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; and all acquire the character of falsehood by the palpable contradictions with which they are filled; by the misshapen, obscure, and often odious ideas, which they give of the Godhead; by the whimsical laws which they attribute to him; in short, they all appear to be a mass of impostures and reveries equally disgusting to reason.—

Ecce Homo.

commands, new doctrines, and new modes of worship, make free inquiry into these matters absolutely necessary; and although none of them will be considered as the messengers of heaven by the few that are wise and considerate, yet the impostors ought to be detected for the benefit of the misled many, who either cannot or dare not think for themselves; for it is equally inconsistent and ridiculous that we should be required to believe men the more, for those very reasons upon which common sense tells us we should believe them the less. Tertulian, speaking of a certain miracle, says, "It is no shame to own it, *because it is a thing to be ashamed of.*" Again he says, "It is wholly credible, *because it is absurd.*" And again, speaking of the same miracle, "It is certain, *because it is impossible.*" St Austin said, that "He believed some things, *because they were absurd and impossible.*" Cicero, that all-accomplished philosopher, though he was himself an honorary priest, wrote a treatise on divination, wherein he has exposed and destroyed the whole revealed religion of the Greeks and Romans, by showing the imposture of all their miracles and oracles; and he records a saying of the wise Cato, the censor, which shows that he understood the whole fraud and mystery of the Roman religion as by law established.

“ I wonder,” says Cato, “ how one of our priests can forbear laughing when he sees another, at the thoughts of that fraud they live by ;” and had the profound Cato lived in the nineteenth century, he would have made the same observation ; for the Christian priests, as well as those of other religions, do, we may be well assured, secretly make themselves merry, when over their cups, at the success of their own craft, and at the weakness of the people in being so easily imposed upon, but more especially for the silly absurdity of maintaining them in luxury as the price of their fables.

The oracles of antiquity formed another order of supernaturals, and Eusebius takes occasion to triumph in charging his antagonist Porphyry with being the head and advocate for a number of the oracles of Greece, making part of the heathen religion ; but he takes care to withhold from us the matter which accompanies those writings of Porphyry, which he quotes ; and this omission alone gives us every reason to believe that the latter was in reality condemning and exposing oracles, instead of being an advocate for them. However, it is certain, that although all the lower and many persons in the higher classes amongst the Greeks did consult ora-

cles in their important affairs, yet in the three greatest schools of philosophy they were treated as the absolute impostures of priests, and as such they are treated by Eusebius. But like all other priests, as he could do nothing without the devil, or some of his subaltern imps, he assures us that these oracles were delivered by demons. Though he could not but see clearly that they were nothing else than cheats, still he would not confess them to be so, because it served the interest and stability of the church, that the devil should have the chief direction of the oracles, the better to run down and explode the old religion.

The origin of oracles was like everything else of the preternatural order, an imposition on the easy credulity of man; a propensity so notorious in him, that you have only to persuade a few people that it is not the sun that causes the appearance of day, and having succeeded in this, you need not despair of making whole nations embrace the same opinion; for let any notion be ever so monstrous or ridiculous, you have only to maintain it by authority for a time until it becomes sanctioned by antiquity, and then the truth of it is proved sufficiently.

All the false religions in the world, or that have

pestered it, have pretended to inspiration, and this shows very clearly that this sort of revelation is, by the common consent of mankind, the very best foundation of supernatural religion, and therefore every impostor pretends to it; but if we would not suffer ourselves to be beguiled, we must be strictly on our guard against deceit, and preserve and protect the moral virtues; for sincerity, fidelity, and honesty, are as truly the life and soul of true religion, as deception and hypocrisy are the bane of it.

Wicked and designing men, who have conjured up a power superior to nature and reason, solely for the purpose of destroying both, “have depreciated the true-born daughter of God, *Faithfulness*, and anointed the bastard Faith in her room.”

In concluding this Lecture, I shall shortly observe that, since as men we are all liable to error, the above reasoning has certainly no claim to be exempt from it; but my chief care has been to advance nothing that is not consonant to reason and experience, free from everything that is mysterious; and to show that the only true religion of moral righteousness, whose basis can be no other than truth, cannot be founded upon any traditional or historical faith, which has no other sup-

port than the relation of prodigies and preternatural actions, which have no other proofs than such as are quite as suspicious as the actions themselves, and altogether inconsistent with common sense and experience.

END OF LECTURE THE SECOND.

LECTURE III.

These fears, this darkness that o'erspreads your souls,
Day can't disperse, but those eternal rules
That from firm premises right reason draws,
And a deep insight into nature's laws.

LUCRETIVS.

“Miracles for fools, and reasons for wise men.”

MIRACLES AND OTHER SUPERNATURALS FURTHER CONSIDERED.

IN dealing with the important subject of supernaturals for the third time, it is analogous with our highest admiration of the All-ruling Power again to observe, that with the exception of the faint and glimmering light which we have of the works of nature before us, all knowledge of the Almighty and Self-directing power is of infinitely too sublime a nature to be comprehended in any degree by poor mortals. And, as we can discover but very few of the causes of the endless effects we see in nature, it is the most ridiculous of all follies to

imagine others, and place them beyond, or external to, the empire of nature. Therefore, none are such great atheists as those men who gain an ascendancy over the minds of their fellow men, and therewith the riches and luxuries of the world, by propagating or maintaining falsehoods,—in impiously pretending, by secret inspiration, to have an exclusive knowledge of that All-ruling Power. Such men have introduced prodigies and doctrines, not only impertinent to, but absurd and unworthy tenets concerning that power, withdrawing men as well from their reason, as from the study and practice of truth. This sacerdotal villany has more or less prevailed in all ages, and must have been well known to the cynic, Diogenes, who made the following answer to a priest who wanted him to join his order:—"Wilt thou (says he) have me to believe that those famous men, Epaminondas and Agesilaus, shall be miserable hereafter, when thou, who art but an ass, *and doest nothing of any work*, shalt be happy only because thou art a priest!"

Early in the fifth century, a highly respectable Bishop of our church, makes the following observations:—"Whoever writes anything for the people (says he), or addresses his speech to them, must necessarily be popular in his doctrine, and invent or discourse what

gratifies them ; for they being unlearned, are therefore pertinacious and intractable defenders of their senseless prejudices, in so much, that if any one declines from the rites and foolish ceremonies of his country, he must prepare to drink the juice of the hemlock." In other words, the amiable Bishop meant to say that the preacher of learning and genius might philosophize at home, but abroad he *must* talk popular nonsense ; for no sort of brute is more cross-grained, or requires more cunning to manage than the superstitious brute, especially if he be ignorant.

Natural powers are amply fit to answer all the ends of virtue and true religion ; therefore, supernatural powers (allowing for a moment the existence of them) are needless. No extraordinary inspiration is necessary to teach the most excellent morals that were ever taught,* with the reasonable belief of one ruling power

* The few precepts of sound morality that are to be found in the New Testament, and which are so much boasted of by Christians, are almost a literal copy of the Morals of Confucius, who wrote about six hundred years before the time of Moses, and nearly two thousand years before the birth of Christ. This will appear evident from some of the following extracts.

24th Moral—"Do to another what you would he should do to you, and do not unto another what you would should not be done unto you : *thou needest only this law alone ; it is the foundation and principle of all the rest.*"

supreme; but so far as regards the NAME by which we designate that power, it cannot possibly be otherwise than a matter of perfect indifference. It may be laid down as a maxim, that as error and falsehood may be confuted, as well by one man, as by a thousand, so reason and truth have no more to fear from one thousand, than from one man. Let us remember the excellent Confucius, the great philosopher of China, who was inferior to no man that ever lived: yet neither pretending to inspiration above nature, nor the power of working miracles, he was the revivor of a religion, of which nature was the author, which is older than even the Chinese race, and as old as their country, which

51st Moral—"Desire not the death of thine enemy; thou wouldst desire it in vain; his life is in the hands of heaven."

53rd Moral—"Acknowledge thy benefits by the return of other benefits, but never revenge injuries."

63rd Moral—"We may have an aversion for an enemy without desiring revenge; the motions of nature are not always criminal."

"Do those things which you think right, though you think that after you have done them, you shall be disesteemed; for the vulgar are ill judges of good things, and as you despise their praise, so despise their censure."

The disciples of Confucius are yet numerous, after the lapse of four thousand years since he lived. He instructed as well by his example as by his precepts; and it would be well if his morals were taught in all the schools of christendom, instead of creeds and dogmas which are unintelligible.

their wise men still esteem and enjoy, and which God never abolished by any NEW WILL, though he has permitted fools that dislike it, to choose other religions. How widely different are such incomparable legislators and moralists, from those impostors of antiquity and of more modern times, teaching their wild and baneful schemes of preternatural revelation; and who, when they perceived that what they established by fraud, could only be supported by force, coalesced with corrupt legislators, to get it made a capital offence to question their dictates, and highly disreputable so much as to examine, but perdition to doubt them. The priests, for their own interest, were never wanting anywhere to promote, and cruelly to enforce all such penal laws; and hence no room was left for the propagation of truth, except at the expense of a man's life or liberty, or at least of his reputation and employments, of which the examples are innumerable in all ages. The Philosophers therefore, and other well-wishers of mankind, were constrained by this holy tyranny, to make use of two doctrines, the one public, and accommodated to the prejudices of the vulgar; the other philosophical, and conformable to reason and the nature of things, consequently to truth, and which they communicated only to friends of known probity, prudence, and capacity;

they being well aware from experience that, in matters of theology, truth can hardly be declared anywhere, except at the hazards that have already been stated. This chaos of error and absurdity, in which men are bewildered, naturally produces the woful effects of mental bondage, superstitious fopperies, pious frauds, unintelligible jargons, gross ignorance, hypocrisy, and human persecution: from all of which proceeds that mass of profligacy and crime that pervades society.

We learn from Zosimus and others, that the Emperor Constantine, whom priests have called the *great*, after he had committed those horrible crimes and cruelties, which the Pagan priests told him were not to be expiated in their religion, was assured by an Egyptian bishop of our church, that there was no crime, no villany so great, but was to be expiated by the sacraments of the Christian religion; and therefore, to get himself white-washed, he embraced the new impiety, (so Zosimus unfortunately calls the Christian religion), and so quitted the religion of his ancestors; for which, however, the priests did not brand *him* with the epithet of apostate, although he was one in the strictest and worst sense of the word. But on his nephew, Julian, one of the best and greatest of human beings, they bestowed this stigma, in spite of the clearest evidence that he was

the very reverse of an apostate, inasmuch as he never did embrace the Christian religion in his heart; for it is a known truth that, in his boyhood, he was forced to an outward conformity with its rites; but this was in semblance only, and that was absolutely necessary in order to save his life from the bloodthirstiness of his imperial cousin. To show the truth of the above remarks, let us see how he satirises our religion;—"Whoever," says he, "is guilty of rapes, murders, sacrilege, or any other abominable crimes, let him be washed with water, and he will become pure and holy; if he relapses into the same impieties, he will again become pure and holy, by thumping his breast, and beating his head."

Traditional and historical facts may be precarious and uncertain, and the most wonderful will always be the most improbable. If the laws of nature are unchangeable, no work can be wrought, or event take place contrary to them, nor can they contradict themselves; if they are changeable, there can be no dependence on anything; for whatever can interfere with, or set them aside, must of necessity set aside all criterions of truth, and all possible knowledge of it. If then there be any truth that may be depended on, what is founded on the laws of nature must remain evidently, and

unchangeably so,—till nature changes,—and can suffer no mutation by miracles. Nature cannot divest itself of itself; and that which may be supposed or imagined capable to do it, is altogether supposition and imagination, because it can only be said, the proof being contrary to nature. The argument on the side of deism, therefore, is so far from being pernicious, or destructive of true religion, that it tends to fix it on true, solid, and eternal principles, which are everywhere of the same importance, stability, and lustre.

Naturalists have observed that there is no species of animals that have not some innate defect or weakness, whereby they are rendered an easy prey to other animals. Now the most vulnerable part of man is on the side of his credulity in supernaturals, that is to say, his belief in that which has no existence; this unhappy propensity has at all times made him ready to be practised upon by the interested cunning ones of his own species, who, by an impudent and confident pretence of knowing more than those around them, have subdued the reason and understanding of the weak and unwary multitude, through whose means they have forced the wise and free-thinking few, into the back ground of non-resistance.

“Anciently, as at this day, numbers of vagabond

priests and wandering theologians subsisted by transporting their superstitions beyond the seas; and sometimes, indeed, they became grand pontiffs in countries converted by them to new errors, perhaps much more pernicious to truth and virtue than those they had destroyed.”*

The word spiritual is admirable in its efficacy, and endless in its applications, inasmuch as things naturally false and absurd, when tried by the rules of reason and common sense, may by it be made perfectly true and consistent; or, in other words, that which appears evidently false in a temporal sense, is capable of being made true in the sense spiritual, alias, the nonsensical sense; and therefore, when considered as a tool in the hands of a skilful divineling, it is perhaps entitled to

* “The missions have for their particular object to extend the power and influence of the clergy. The church sends enthusiasts or knaves to the extremities of the earth, to beat up for subjects, and these missionaries transact their business vastly well, and open to themselves new branches of commerce; but their insolence and imprudence have occasioned the proscription of the Christian religion, in Japan, China, &c. Our missionaries were everywhere well received in the beginning, and in general suffered expulsion or martyrdom, only when their real designs were discovered. Kambi, emperor of China, asked the Jesuit missionaries, at Pekin, what they would say, if he would send missionaries to their nation? A holy missionary has been heard to say, that without MUSKETS missionaries never could make proselytes.”

rank as high as inspiration itself; however, they may justly be called the watch-words of theology.

If we may depend upon anything that Origen has given us, as being the arguments of Celsus against him, it appears the latter asserted that it was the want of strict examination and scrutiny into the reports of reputed miracles, that gained them credit in the credulous world at first. He makes Celsus say, that some of the Christians, neither examining what it was they believed, nor caring to be examined,* used this expression:—"Do not examine into matters, *but believe*, and thy faith shall infallibly save thee." Celsus would have made the same observation if he had lived in these

* Men 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 hoped; and they tremble, because they trembled. In youth, the ardour of our passions, and the continual ebriety of our senses, 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 object 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

times, when all scrutiny and exposure is punished by the strong arm of tyranny. This mental darkness and oppression degrades, and prevents man from becoming what nature intended he should be, a rational being; and the foolish reveries and deceptions of some vagrant preachers, who lived nobody knows exactly when, or where, whose veracity was either denied by, or unknown to, the men of genius and learning who lived in, and after the time of Celsus; and whose barefaced assertions and inconsistencies are forcibly planted as the standards of other men's faith, by the canting art of priests, who condemn arguments they cannot confute, a method practised everywhere by the promoters of error, and those who prefer interest to truth, which they strive to reduce to the level of falsehood; but no power can make that to be true, which is found false when tried by nature and reason; so no wise man would regard their sentence, if it was not unhappily backed by the power of doing mischief.

It has already been observed that, to avoid being accused of impiety by the priests, the lovers of truth have

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 inquiry; and holds itself in continual readiness to punish all who attempt to undeceive them.—BOULANGER.

in almost every country, been obliged to conceal their deistical opinions from motives of self-preservation, while they despised the mob, scorned the priest, and enjoyed their silent liberty of conscience.

The famous Lord Shaftesbury, when conferring one day with Major Wildman, about the many sects of religion in the world, all hostile to each other, they came to this conclusion, that, notwithstanding those infinite divisions caused by the interests of the priests, and the consequent ignorance of the people, all wise men, in all ages and countries, have always been of the same religion; whereupon a lady in the room, who till then seemed to mind her needle more than their discourse, demanded with much concern, “what that religion was?” to whom Lord Shaftesbury immediately replied, “*Madam, wise men never tell.*”

Aristotle, that consummate philosopher, did, during the life of his pupil and patron, Alexander the Great, freely read to his scholars the lessons of truth and philosophical freedom; but after the death of Alexander, Eurimedon, a priest, accused him of impiety, for introducing some philosophical opinions contrary to the religion of the Athenians, and he was forced to steal privately from Athens, giving this reason to his friends—“That he left Athens that he might not give the Athenians occasion

to commit again the same wickedness they committed against Socrates, and be guilty of a double crime against philosophy.

It is no wonder that one miracle is said to be wrought to prove another. Miracles can be defended by nothing but miracles, for if they could be proved by anything else, that proof would be a miracle. Homogeneous things nourish and support each other; animal organization can alone be supported by that which has itself been organized, either in animal or in vegetable life; truth is supported by truth; lies by lies; fraud by fraud, and force by force. But it seems very unreasonable that the worst story-tellers should demand the best credit, and that on the severest penalties. This of itself is a sufficient demonstration of the badness of such stories, and of the cause in which they are told, that they need such penalties to make them pass; for the most shining truth is always attended with the clearest evidence, and virtue, being the offspring of truth, is wholly without compulsion. They go hand in hand, always attended by freedom; but error dwells with dissimulation, vice, and compulsion.

To shew how far some of the garbled and ridiculous stories, as related in the Bible, differ from the very same stories told in a rational and historical manner, by Jose-

phus, a tolerably good historian of the Jews,—speaking of Cain, he says, “that after a tedious journey through several countries, he took up at length at Nais, and settled his abode; but was so far from mending upon his affliction, that he went rather from bad to worse, abandoning himself to all manner of outrage, without any regard to common justice; he enriched himself by rapine and violence, and made choice of the most profligate of monsters for his companions, instructing them in the very mystery of their profession. He corrupted the simplicity of FORMER TIMES, with a novel invention of weights and measures; and exchanged the innocency of that *primitive* generosity and candour, for the new tricks of policy and craft. All of which shews plainly enough, that the world had been full of inhabitants long before the father of Cain existed.*

The story of Nebuchadnezzar is truly beastly as told in Daniel, who says “he was driven from men and did

* Both the Hebrew and Samaritan texts support this truth, for Cain, when lamenting his doom, says to God (or Shaddai)—“When driven from thy presence, I shall be a fugitive upon the earth, and it will happen that whosoever shall meet me will kill me.” and God said “No, for I will put a mark upon you, *so that you shall not be killed by any person who may meet you.*” Now as Abel was killed, and Seth not yet born, whom could Cain possibly meet in his wanderings to kill him, *except his own father*, if other inhabitants had not existed upon the earth?

eat grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles feathers, and his nails like birds' claws." Josephus tells the story thus, "that Nebuchadnezzar, after seven years spent in solitude, and no one daring during that time to disturb his government, God was prevailed on to reinstate him in the exercise of his kingly power." He farther says that the passage of the Red Sea by the Israelites, was effected by the same means and manner as that which happened to the Macedonians under the command of Alexander, at the Pamphilian sea, in which there was nothing miraculous, if Alexander himself is to be believed.

When he relates the miraculous appearance of Moses's God on Mount Sinai, he adds, "that the reader may take this as he pleases"—a judicious hint, that he may believe as much or as little of the story as he pleases. If any priest, or lover of the marvellous, should ask me why I prefer the relations of Josephus to those of the Bible, I answer, simply because the accounts of the former are plain, rational, and perfectly consistent with experience in matters of fact and history, whereas the latter are exactly the reverse in all these particulars.

We are told that God has wrought wonders for the

benefit and satisfaction of one generation and not for another ; but if such violations of nature's laws could be at all necessary, they would be equally so at all times, and to every people. By this impious charge the justice, mercy, goodness, and wisdom of the supreme being is degraded, inasmuch as he is represented to us as a partial God, full of capricious levity, now choosing one thing, then another, and frequently repenting of his actions, so as to be under the necessity of amending them by the working of miracles ! The belief of such absurdities is destructive to the moral character of the deity. "The wonders which are said to have been wrought in one age, can never convince a sober thinker in the next, unless there be such lasting monuments of them, and they are so clearly and fully evidenced that they appear true against all contradiction : " nor is it fit they should ; because, to believe that miracles were performed in a certain manner, time, and place, of which no shadow of proof remains more than in the bare report, is putting faith in the reporters, not in the operators ; thus I may be always amused by fabulous tales as often as simple or bad men please to relate them, unless I can be sure that no man will tell a lie to serve his own ends, or be imposed upon by others to believe a false story.

As the Supreme power always acts towards man agreeably to the moral fitness of things, there can be neither room nor occasion for prodigies ; for if reasonable exhortations to virtue, and dissuasions from vice,—if the example of moral goodness and just laws will not make people virtuous, nothing can. But pretended miracles and inspirations rather force the passions by violent, than guide them by gentle means, and drive men on without rational sense, instead of driving it into them. Surprise seizes the imagination, the person no longer hesitates concerning truth, or deliberates of virtue, but is carried away, in the rapid torrent of his misguided passions, by the power of supernatural chimeras, which astonish and subvert the imagination. Such is the gloomy consequence when priests succeed in making whatever impressions they please on the minds of the people, and that which reason rejects, and refuses to support, is upheld by force and custom. This settled habit, or custom, may be called the goddess of the multitude,* who, when backed by their theological leaders, which they are sure

* Ye seek for happiness—alas, the day !
Ye find it not in luxury nor gold,
Nor in the fame, nor in the envied sway
For which, O willing slaves to custom old,
Severe task mistress ! ye your hearts have sold.

Laon and Cythna.

to be in all superstitions, are then very dangerous, as well as ridiculous opponents of common sense; for their inconsiderate fury has in all ages proved the greatest support of the priests against reason, and hence the generally received axiom, that the ignorance of the laity is the revenue of the clergy.* While matters stand thus, it will be a hard matter to come at truth ourselves, and dangerous to publish it to others.

Amongst the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and other nations of antiquity, their numerous gods and goddesses were taken by the ignorant rabble to be so many real personages, and this folly was carefully inculcated and taught them by their priests: but amongst the wise and the initiated they were considered to be nothing else than so many names for the various physical powers of nature, for causes, qualities, incidents, &c.; but as the prudent and the wise alone were initiated, they carefully concealed their opinions respecting the principles of

* Dr Echard wrote a book on the "contempt of the clergy," and Lord Hallifax observed to him that in the said book he had not hit on the true cause of that contempt, viz,—the knowledge of the laity; to which the doctor readily replied, "*God be thanked*, there was ignorance enough still among the laity to support the authority of the clergy." ✕


✕ The priests held that Ignorance is
the mother of Devotion—

things, and truth was delivered only under enigmas and symbols ; under allegories and metaphors ; thus the famous Isis of the Egyptians, whom the vulgar believed to have been a queen, and of whom they had thousands of fables, meant nothing but nature, *or the nature of all things*, according to the philosophers, who held the universe, or all matter, to be the ruling principle, or God. And consequently the Supreme Being was said to be obscure, or beyond comprehension, none seeing deeper than the surface of nature ; which in some degree deciphers the inscription upon the figure of Isis at Sais, "I AM ALL THAT WAS, IS, AND SHALL BE ; NOR HAS ANY MORTAL DISCOVERED WHAT IS UNDER MY HOOD."

It is very remarkable that in the Mosaic story of the burning bush, Moses puts into the mouth of the God, whose hinder parts he pretends to have seen there, the very name which the Almighty power had always borne in the sacred mysteries of Isis, viz.—"I am," or, "I am that I am,—thou shalt say to the people of Israel, *I am* hath sent thee," which shows that Moses was an adept in those mysteries, and that he knew how to turn them to his own account, in imposing upon his ignorant followers.

If pure deism was universally diffused, then all the stocks and branches of the numerous systems of revealed religion would be rooted out and destroyed, tainted and deeply corrupted as every one of them is with the interest and riches of the clergy.*

Then farewell to all the holy wars of the Church : farewell to all the holy burnings and massacres of the infuriated zealots of these religions. Nature, being as it were defiled with the sacred poison, would resume her purity and rights ; and truth and virtue would prevail everywhere ; but he who rears up in his own mind altars to superstition, is a worshipper of the most abominable of idols, and is incapable of feeling the force and energy of truth.

A celebrated philosopher has said, that if God had  deigned to make himself a man, and a Jew, and to die in Palestine by an infamous punishment, to expiate the crimes of mankind, and to banish sin from the earth, there ought to have been no longer any sin, or crime on the face of it, whereas, says he, religious crimes seem only to have commenced since the time when that event is said to have happened ; and the Christians have been

* Interest is the father of all revealed religions ; implicit belief begets and fosters ignorance, and ignorance is the mother of devotion.

+ more abominable monsters than all the sectaries of the other religions put together;* and he brings for an evident proof of this, the massacres, the wheels, the gibbets, and the horrible burnings at the stake of nearly a hundred thousand human creatures in a single province—the massacres of the anabaptists—the massacres of the Lutherans and Papists, from the Rhine to the extremities of the north,—the massacres in Ireland, England, and Scotland, in the time of Charles the First, who was himself massacred,—the massacres ordered by Henry the Eighth, and his daughter Mary,—the massacres of St Bartholomew in France, and forty years more of other massacres between the time of Francis the First, and the entry of Henry the Fourth into Paris,—the massacres by the inquisition, which are more execrable still, as being judicially committed—the massacre of twelve millions of the inhabitants of the new world, executed

* The Jews may perhaps be regarded as an exception on a small scale, for “their history displays the most memorable examples of the evils arising from superstition and fanaticism: for from these arose the numerous revolutions, the horrid and bloody wars, and at last the total destruction of that people as a nation, from their submission to priests, and their endless credulity; and from this roguery of their priests alone, they became beyond all contradiction the most despicable people that ever existed, being continually misled by the knavish commissions which their priests had from heaven.”

CRUCIFIX IN HAND, and this, without reckoning all the massacres precedently committed in the name of Jesus Christ, to say nothing of the innumerable schisms, and twenty wars of popes against popes, bishops against bishops, the poisonings, the assassinations, the rapines of more than a dozen of popes, who far exceeded a Nero or a Caligula, in every species of crime and wickedness ; in short, he observes that this horrid and almost uninterrupted chain of religious wars for fourteen centuries, never subsisted but among Christians, and that no people but themselves ever spilt a drop of human blood for theological arguments. We are obliged to grant to this philosopher that all this is true, and to which may be added the horrors with which so many Christian churches, from the very first of their existence, have stained themselves ; the cowardly barbarity of the magistrates who could sacrifice to the priests so many worthy subjects ; the princes, who, to please them, have become infamous persecutors ; so much downright nonsense in all ecclesiastical quarrels ; so many abominations in the course of them ; the people murdered or ruined ; the thrones of so many priests composed of the spoils, and cemented with the blood of men ;* the enormous chaos of absur-

* "The cross was the banner under which madmen assembled to glut the earth with blood !"

dities accompanying these crimes, all supported by the then main-stay of the church, the fires of the inquisition; and mark well that our priests would act the same tragedies at this day if law and usage did not restrain them.* Should all the Christians have murdered each other, brothers cut the throats of brothers for the sake of arguments, and should there remain no more than a single Christian on the face of the earth, let him look at the sun, and it is impossible that he should not acknowledge and adore one single, eternal, and almighty being, which comprehends within itself everything that exists,—that infinite, material, and intellectual sphere, “the centre of which is everywhere, and the circumference nowhere.”

Even atheism itself may perhaps be only false reasoning; whereas superstition is not only false reasoning, but superinduces the passion of fear, which is destitute

* The modern religion of Europe, says Mirabaud, has visibly caused more ravages and troubles than any other superstition, and is in that respect very accordant to its principles. The theology of the present day is a subtle 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.

both of courage and reason, and renders us stupid, distracted, and inactive; for of all fears none confounds a man so thoroughly as the fear of the religionist; and of all mobs none are so sanguinary and dangerous to the votaries of reason as the fanatical mob, stirred up at the instance of their priests; and those of antiquity differed in nothing from the rabble of the present day, except in having a more innocent, and less absurd superstition.

Those men who use their understanding must have more sense than those who use it not, but allow others to understand for them; yet if any man presumes to think for himself, and in consequence of that, refuses to follow the sentiments of the common herd of mankind around him, he cannot fail to draw upon himself the most virulent malice of the priest, and all his believing adherents, together with all those who hope to forward their interests by pretending to believe in him, which will be about nine hundred and ninety-nine in every thousand; so that our votary of truth and reason can have no credit but for what his virtue necessarily procures for him, in spite of the malice of his enemies; whereas, any profligate fellow is sure of credit, countenance, and support in any sect or party whatsoever, although he has no other quality to recommend him than the worst of all vices, a blind zeal for his own sect or party.

+ The philosopher already alluded to goes so far as to tell us of a miracle that is recorded in the appendix of the first council of Nicē, wherein it is said, that the holy bishops, being full of zeal to distinguish the canonical books from the false, placed all the immense collection confusedly upon a great table, and a prayer was addressed to the Holy Ghost, that he would be pleased to cause the apocryphal writings to fall to the ground,—that they did so of themselves accordingly, and went under the table, whilst those that were genuine remained upon it. He even hazards a conjecture that the Holy Ghost might possibly receive some assistance in the night, in selecting those to be the word of God, which favoured the temporal interests of the clergy, and the grandeur of the church; whilst the story of the priests of Bel, or Baal, and all such books, would be decidedly apocryphal, for exposing the tricks of the priests in consuming the provisions of the God, during the night.

Photius relates that the celebrated Synesius, originally a heathen of great learning and abilities, was, like the wise Celsus, a disbeliever in all miracles; yet he easily came into the belief of the resurrection, after he was made a bishop; and after receiving the new light, as the consequence of his promotion, he declared that exact philosophical truth was not necessary for “the vulgar,

who might receive hurt from their knowledge; I shall therefore (says he) tell fables to the people, suffering them to live in their prejudices." So do the dignitaries of the church in the present day.

It cannot be too often repeated that supernaturals of all descriptions form the market in which the mental liberties, properties, and the souls of men are bought and sold. This trade is beneficial to the teachers or venders, but prejudicial in practice to the customers; the doctors gain what the disciples lose by it; the more poverty it causes to the stupid believers, the more opulence and luxury the preachers enjoy,—the more the simple convert gives, the more the church receives. All concerned in a false religion must necessarily be either sheepish prey, or preying wolves, but the true religion is equally within the comprehension of all, and allows of no inlet to designing knavery, being agreeable to, and worthy of God and nature, therefore pure and perfect. But all revealed, or artificial religions, puzzle and confound their victims, bewildering them in a maze of confusion, wherein they cannot distinguish between good and evil, labouring as they do under the uncertainty of moral right and wrong. But that of nature clears the apprehension, and informs the judgment, producing satisfaction and serenity

of mind. Reason and nature, uncorrupted by bad education, or regenerated from it, afford the possessor pleasures pure and harmonious, widely different from the ghastly starts and convulsive raptures of the saintly fanatic, whose high tide of spiritual folly rolls rapidly on, and leaves the channel dry. "Not so the charms of philosophy,—it has all the serene majesty and harmony of nature within, and without, it is all manly, just, and good." But religion formed by human inventions produces perplexity and discord; because it is founded upon false, unnatural, and precarious principles; and in the paroxysms of a blind and heated zeal, is a hell in the minds of its votaries, as well as occasioning a hell without to the world. What horrors has it not begotten? What species of iniquity has it not brought forth? By its fruits it may be known. Thus, from what has been shown, it follows that a religion built on fallible human traditions (as all the revealed systems are) is necessarily fallible and human. Why then should that be infallibly depended on, or how can that be safely credited, which is not erected on infallible principles, but on fables and legends that are equally absurd and uncertain? or, if it was possible they should be true, we cannot possibly know them to be so. Again let it be repeated, that

+ Divine Philosophy —
 Not harsh & cracked as all
 fools believe —

obscurity and uncertainty are the best cloaks for falsehood to wrap itself in.

It is true that the fatted calf of superstition is now staggering as from a fatal thrust, yet if men are not incessantly on their guard for the conservation of their liberties, what security have we that those times may not return, when a hireling priesthood, backed by mad fanatics, will, as they already have done, destroy the supporters of these truths with fire and fagot? But the truths themselves can never be destroyed, because they are founded in nature and right reason. Let the soaring irrational enthusiast mount as high as the aspiring ladder of man's sublimest stretch of imagination can carry him, *it is nature all the way*: beyond it no philosopher, but fools alone presume, or knaves, in their insincerity.

To believe things dishonourable of God is certainly bringing no honour to him; for instance, to believe that he cannot, or will not pardon guilty persons, unless he takes vengeance on an innocent person; that he will not save the unrighteous, unless he condemns the righteous; "that God the Father is not good nor beneficent to man, unless God the Son makes him so; and that God the Holy Ghost is implacable, and will not forgive sins committed against himself,—can this faith be called

righteousness which makes the *gods* unrighteous?*" And is this the faith that must save mankind, which damns both gods and men? Here is an impious and unrighteous faith, which we are required to believe in as righteousness." To believe, or acquiesce in such blasphemous absurdities, requires that ample share of stupidity which the Supreme power has granted to true believers only; and if thou, O Lord, art not more gracious and benignant than thy worshippers represent thee, thou wilt have but little praise or adoration from honest infidels, whose minds are capable of rational and just reflection, however fond thou mayest be of the abject homage of human worship; for they will sooner believe with fools that there is no supreme power necessarily existing in the government of the universe, than that there is such a God as knaves represent thee.† And if they are to be

* Sacerdotal knavery has engendered, and ignorance and implicit belief have sanctioned ideas, so monstrous as to charge the Almighty power with having devised the murder of innocence to atone for guilt!!! Such a faith as this is more preposterous, more wicked, and more impious than downright Atheism itself. "The immolating or sacrificing of one person or thing, to atone for the guilt of another, can make no part of the economy of an all-wise and all-powerful being; such unjust substitution involving a virtual denial of these sublime attributes."

† "The odious dogmas of predestination and effectual calling, which make God the most fanatical and cruel of tyrants, by

damned for this, they will be damned with a good conscience, so that even the hell of priests cannot be a bad one while a consciousness of rectitude remains. If there is no material fire in that hell for the body, there is no immaterial that can hurt a good conscience.

But granting for a moment the hypothesis that superstition has in any instance, or at any time, proved beneficial to human society, owing to its distortion; yet at other times, without number, and in things of incomparably greater importance, it is found to have been detrimental, destructive, and utterly pernicious; nor advantageous to any, except to priests or princes, who dexterously turn it to their own interest, and always direct it according to their own pleasure. But the crafty empirics do not stop here; they know full well that the falsity of facts, and the utterly untenable ground of their arguments, may at any time be detected by men of penetration, and therefore they have always boasted of a superior, or what they call a divine knowledge above

supposing that he punishes to all eternity those to whom he refuses the means, or the will, of saving themselves,—this gives us the idea of nothing but a whimsical tyrant, who, if he be lavish of his favours to a few, is at least cruel and unjust to the rest: surely nothing can be more inconsistent with the just notions of an immutable deity, whose mercies are infinite, and whose goodness is inexhaustible.”

nature, and which, they say, is not subject to the rules of criticism, nor in any respect an object of the understanding. In this metaphysical strong-hold they have hitherto sheltered themselves against the light of nature and common sense, and the effects have been in the highest degree pernicious and deadly to reason, freedom, and the happiness of mankind, by introducing and establishing spiritual tyranny in the clergy, and the most abject slavery of mind in their silly believers.

It may be objected, that God can do things contrary to nature, but we repeat that, setting aside all foolish and inconsistent traditions, what proof is there that the supreme power ever did, or ever will suspend, or depart from, the eternal laws of nature (*"that it can, is doubtful; that it never will, is certain"*). And therefore every man of judicious reflection may suspend his belief until he is rationally convinced, and by a noble effort spurn from his mind the priestly scourge of damnation which hangs over him for doubting. This famous scourge "drives faith into the timorous, as a mallet drives a wedge into a BLOCK; and in like manner divides, rends, and weakens the understanding."

Common sense, if not suppressed, is alone sufficient to destroy all the evidence in the world of a thing that is

diametrically opposed to it; for it would be a foolish attempt to prove a fact true, by other facts which equally want proof themselves.

On a faith so pernicious every unprejudiced person must look with abhorrence, and hold in suspicion the professors thereof, whether they are induced to it by their own blind ignorance, or by hire and bribery; the former class deserve our pity, from their neglect of common sense; the latter merit our contempt from their shameless selfishness and delusions. In the present dawn of rational light, the minds of the rising generation should therefore be taught to be on their guard, as to the compass by which they direct their judgment and conduct;—let them scrupulously weigh arguments, and the reason of things impartially; and let not men be deluded by holy names and a face of godliness; since it has generally happened that those whom Holy Mother Church has designated as saints, have been the vilest of men; insomuch that saint and villian have commonly meant the same thing, and may be considered as synonymous terms; for it has seldom escaped the penetration of those who are capable of thinking, that all who appear more sanctified than others whose pretensions go not beyond the standard of moral honesty, have only been so much more secretly and artfully wicked. And therefore,

if we would not be choused out of our understanding and substance, by base hypocrisy in every grave and holy shape, let us remember the old maxim, "when you see a saint, *look to yourself.*"

Since all the authority that we have of the authenticity of the earliest Christian writings and traditions, is from the fathers of the church, it is highly proper that the character and conduct of these men should not wholly escape observation; and against some of them it has been strongly contended by many of the pagan writers of credit, that those writings called gospels, had no existence as we now see them, until very long (some say more than two centuries) after the times in which it is said the Apostles lived; that they were compiled by obscure persons from the writings of the Egyptian monks, or Therapeutæ, who prefixed the names of certain Apostles to their writings, the better to obtain credit; that these were again altered, amended, and fitted up at will by the early fathers of the church, to suit their own interest, and the ignorance of the times; of which fact we have sufficient proofs; and amongst others the younger Scaliger expressly declares, that "they put into their scriptures, or gospels, whatever they thought would serve their purpose." Faustus says, "*we have frequently proved* that these things were neither writ-

ten by himself (Jesus Christ) nor by his Apostles, and that they were picked up long after their decease, from vague stories and flying reports." Of such suspicious materials did a few of the fathers compose and trim up the gospels; each espousing those parts as canonical in which his interest, and his peculiar tenets were to be found, rejecting such parts as did but indifferently favour the views of the clergy, as being apocryphal: but of all these trimmers, none equalled the famous Eusebius, bishop of Cæsarea, at getting up, and dressing off a gospel to suit the general interests of the church.

But, "to be particular about the fathers,—any attempt to delineate their ambition, insolence, avarice, ignorance, faction, sedition, persecution of each other, cruelty, murders,* lies and forgeries, and other flagrant vices, would be endless; yet these are the men whose honesty we are to depend upon for conveying to us THE ORACLES of TRUTH. Are we to learn our religion from men immersed in such vices, and who wanted charity? From men who were perpetually quarrelling with, and

* Episcopus says of the Council of Nicē, and others of that early period, "that they were led on by fury, faction, and madness," which is corroborated by another author, who relates, that at the second synod of Ephesus, Dioscorus, bishop of Alexandria, knocked and kicked Flavianus, Patriarch of Constantinople, with such fury that within three days after he died."—*L'Abb: Concil.*

cursing each other? No people upon earth ever differed more, or proceeded with greater fury and bitterness in their differences:—they were constantly quarrelling about the smallest, as well as the greatest points; and for the smallest as well as the greatest they damned one another. That these foul marks belong to many of the fathers, and all of them to some, is too manifest. In a word, a man might fill volumes with the bare recital only, and that from the very best authorities, of the impieties and senseless vanities of the fathers; but indeed ecclesiastical history has done it already to our hands, being itself nothing but a compendium of their vices.”*

If we have the relations of foolish and unnatural stories, said to have happened nearly two thousand years before our time, and cannot possibly come at the true characters of the first relators, there is surely no evidence that can be relied upon; but if the characters of the intermediate relators are well known, and we have every reason to believe from their writings, and all we have been able to learn of them otherwise, that they were

* We learn from Burnet’s Exposition, that the practice of unnatural lusts had been so general amongst the dignitaries of the church, that Saint Bernard, in a sermon preached to the clergy of France, affirmed sodomy to be so common in his time, *that bishops with bishops lived in it.*

both weak and *enthusiastical, self-interested, and designing knaves*, easily imposed on themselves when lucre led the way, and ever readily disposed to deceive others, then the relation deserves no credit whatever. “And such a set of men the fathers, or heads of the contending sects, appear evidently to have been, almost to a man, during the four first centuries; injudicious in all they relate, taken up with every idle report, uncharitable, ignorant of true religion, bigots, knavish in all favourite points of theology, and betrayers of the simple deism of primitive Christianity; and instead of establishing the books called scriptures by their testimonies, they have rendered them the most precarious and suspicious writings in the world.”

Such were the men who compiled, amended, and changed at pleasure, what they have called the word of God, founding thereon a system of religion which has taken root in a considerable portion of the world; and to the shame of abused and credulous mankind, it has been established, as it were, in defiance of the light of nature, reason, common sense, and all experience; and, what is yet still more strange and revolting, by those very means and agencies which men ought to hold most in contempt and detestation;—viz., forgery, mystery, pretended miracles, prophecy, fraud, hypocrisy, avarice, cruelty, tyranny,

wars and massacres which have deluged the earth with blood, and sacrificed hundreds of millions of human beings to the baleful demon of superstition.

However painful the confession may be, we are obliged to acknowledge that all these horrid wars and massacres on account of religious opinions, have afflicted mankind only since the introduction of Christianity, and during its progress for the last fifteen hundred years; for, in the former times, the men called heathens, or pagans, had no exclusive religion, and every man was at full liberty to worship his God in any way he pleased; every thing in their mythology was easy, pliant, and harmonious, and they never thought of cutting each others' throats on account of speculative notions in religion, except in a few solitary instances, when goaded on by their priests against enlightened individuals, as in the case of Socrates, Aristotle, &c.; but, generally, the priests thought only of multiplying the sacrifices, and other offerings for their own support; and they were even so indulgent as to permit their votaries to laugh as much as they pleased at the ridiculous notion of sticking a knife into the neck of a calf, in order to disarm the wrath of all the gods and goddesses, provided the veal was of a proper age, fat, and well flavoured. This was an easy, light, and jocular superstition, which, like all

artificial religions, stood most endangered from disuse and oblivion; and, therefore, if numerous sacrifices were continually offered, and Jupiter was invoked at all, the priests did not much concern themselves about the manner, or the many names under which he received worship and adoration; only they took special care that this worship should not be deemed efficacious without their intervention. Thus we see that superstition suffers neither God, man, nor the other animals to live in peace, as evidently appears from the sacrifices of antiquity, as well as from the more gloomy and costlier religions of more modern invention. In those times, the foolish enthusiasts often saddled their family inheritances with an annual routine of entailed sacrifices, which burdened the land, and rendered it less valuable; for all purchasers wished to have the land *sine sacris, sine sumptu*, as people now wish to get rid of tithes.

The numerous herd of believers in miracles, in place of being the best, is the very worst touchstone of truth, since the number of fools so far exceeds that of the wise; and he is not to be thought impious who portrays the god of the priest-led multitude, but he who applies the opinions of the multitude to the Supreme Being.

It has been observed elsewhere that, if the pretended miracles which are brought forward to prove the truth of

any set of dogmas, stand themselves equally in need of proof, and that proof naturally impossible, they only add to the string of absurdities; and it cannot be denied, that all the three religions that now inthral the human mind in Europe, part of Africa, and a great portion of western Asia, have had abundance of miracles, but the code of the last invented one is the smallest in number, and these have been fabricated by Mahometan priests since the time of the founder. Now, since about three fourths of mankind are neither Jews, Christians, nor Mahometans, these miracles (allowing for a moment the truth of them) have been wrought with more partiality than justice, there having been thousands of millions of men who never heard of Moses, Jesus Christ, or Mahomet.

‘The Supreme Being is best displayed in the fixed and unalterable order of nature.’

Tully says—

“The superstitious man, asleep or awake,
Enjoys no repose :
He lives not happily,
Nor dies securely,
Who, living and dying,
Is a prey to silly priests.”

LECTURE IV.

Wolves shall succeed for teachers ; grievous wolves
Who all the sacred mysteries of nature
To their own vile advantages shall turn,
Of lucre and ambition ; and the truth,
Plain truth, shall then retire
Bestuck with sland'rous darts——
——So shall the world go on,
To good malignant, to bad men benign ;
Under her own weight groaning, till the day
Appear of respiration to the just.

MILTON.

ON TRUTH, AS THE BEST BOND OF SOCIETY.

WHEN the free and unprejudiced mind takes a comprehensive view of the present structure of society in all its degrees, particularly in what are called the higher walks of it, the best feelings of our nature are shocked and outraged, on perceiving that deceit and dissimulation, are the indispensable pre-requisites in the strife of making way in the world, and seem to be regularly

taught in youth, both by precept and example, so as to make the perfection of education to consist in the practice of that falseness of intellectual conduct, which causes every man, and every woman, to appear exactly the reverse of what they are in reality. Nor is there any remedy for this horrid condition of things. "So shall the world go on," while superstition maintains her pestiferous sway; and every attempt to remodel society from the foundation, will be vain and hopeless, so long as that arch fiend remains, to mix and poison the wholesome streams that flow from the pure fountain of morality; for the fatal mixture of this foul ingredient has rendered man so depraved by errors, so tainted with the most atrocious crimes, and so excessively ferocious, through having nearly destroyed the original mildness of his nature, that there is now hardly any animal viler than man.

But if the principles of society were calculated for the general good of mankind, and founded upon a basis in nature, truth never could be injurious to any human being; and it is unsuitable to man only in consequence of his departure from nature, and his having been long immersed in the follies and superstitions of an absurd education, and afraid to look truth in the face. There is hardly any usage or

custom in society that is not so unnatural, false, and pernicious, that it may be doubted whether the very reverse of every one of them, would not be beneficial to it, and place humanity on a better footing than that on which it stands at present. This enormous mass of corruption has given rise to the beautiful allegory of the well: for truth, seeing herself despised, and her throne usurped by the hags of hypocrisy and superstition, modestly creeps back into the bottom of her well, out of which her small still voice is seldom heard, drowned as it is by the thundering and overbearing tones of her opponents, the votaries of error, and theologic vision. But when mankind shall be prepared to make the light of nature, truth, and virtue, the only groundwork and bond of society, in place of human artifice, falsehood, and the vicious notions which they have always been addicted to, in forming their deity after their own image and character, then will truth come forth from the bottom of her well, and appear in her native loveliness and simplicity, no longer to be deemed injurious to the human race, as there will then be an end to that juggling imposture that has hitherto ruled the world.

In the present distorted order of things, error is

carefully propagated and handed down from father to son, from family to family, and the mind is debauched in early youth by the folly of impressions instilled by superstitious parents, and the craft of interested hirelings, whose visionary ravings are founded on faith in supernatural mysteries and prodigies; and as that which is the object of faith, never can be that of reason, so we have bigotry and intolerance in its place. These are some of the unhappy results of man's having swerved so far from the laws and principles of his nature, as to become quite unnatural in almost every institution and custom in which his happiness is mainly concerned;) and hence arise all his miseries in society.

Amongst the numerous objections that would readily be started against a conformity to the laws of nature, a very prominent one would be to the free intercourse between the sexes, at which the slave of artificial society would take the alarm, and declare that if the laws of marriage did not exist as they are at present, and if love was not shackled by their prohibitions, how would a man be able to know his children if he had not the exclusive possession of his wife? This is an old question, but it is only measuring the magnitude of an evil by others which surround, and are connected with it; for while the

whole structure of society is indeed nothing but a Pandora's box, where evil is created to prop up evil against the light and laws of nature, I repeat that, any attempt to remedy an individual ill would be unavailing; and, therefore, nothing short of a radical reformation of society, on the basis of nature, truth, and reason, can restore man to that happiness which his mind and organization are capable of enjoying. In a state well regulated by good and equal laws, which nourish the moral virtues, love would be free to man as it is to all the other animals, and would mainly console and sweeten his existence,—

“And love made free,—a hope which we have nurst

“As nature's choicest solace,—”

instead of serving to be the pest of his life, as it now is generally; and the bringing forth of children to that state, under any circumstances whatsoever, would tend to the good repute and honor of the women, in place of being what it now is, a stigma, a reproach, a curse, to all who are not in the commonly unfortunate monopoly of marriage, which comprises hardly a half of the sex, whilst the other moiety are condemned to contend against nature through life.

Laws, which appear to be a perfect rule for the most

perfect of all things, they being no other than the laws of Almighty Power, must certainly be allowed to be the most perfect rule for the conduct of mankind. Cicero, who possessed the highest gifts of mind and genius, declares that, "it is impossible to err as long as we follow the guidance of nature;" and again,—“there is no man, who, following the dictates of nature, may not arrive at perfection,”—meaning all the perfection his nature is capable of.

So long as man shall continue the idle attempt to distinguish nature from herself, and from truth, so long will his senses and reason be hoodwinked and bewildered; with a mind enervated by idle tales of gross superstitious folly, he trembles before idols, the creation of his own fancy; perpetually occupied in disarming their wrath by forms of prayer and adulation, borrowed from the meanest human usages, and taught him by those whose interest it is to uphold those systems of delusion, by which they enjoy in ease and affluence the good things of the world; he has wantonly wasted the fruits of his industry in building fine houses for these imaginary beings to dwell in, or at least for their occasional accomodation; he has sacrificed his own species by millions, to serve and glorify them; he has made psalms and ballads and sung them in their praise, in

imitation of the flatterers of great men; he has scourged himself; he has danced, he has lamented, he has clothed himself gorgeously; he has gone naked, and in nastiness; he has sat upon nails run into his flesh; in a word, there is hardly a whim or a prank that the imagination can devise, which has not been in exercise to disarm, or propitiate those unreal forms of his own fancy.

To all this has man submitted in times past, and what is worse, he may continue to do so for centuries to come, before he can effectually discard the foolish mummeries that blind him, and rally round the standard of his reason, a task that is exceedingly difficult, for, as we have already observed, the pride of men will endure no correction in these matters, judging every attempt of the kind to be a reflection upon their understanding, although, in truth, these faculties of the mind had not been consulted or exercised; yet they are ever ready to defend, with the most passionate obstinacy, whatever they have been accustomed to reverence in the shape of religion, or other customs, however preposterous; and the voice of reason prevails with few indeed.

It has often been urged, by those who candidly acknowledge the prevalence of such absurd abuses, that it is better to sanction their continuance than to attack

and expose them, as such notions of preternatural powers serve a good purpose in society, by keeping the lower orders in fear and subjection. But any strength that is in this argument, does, in reality, favour the true and rational side of the question, as it amounts to a broad admission that there is a general secession from the simplicity of nature, that insincerity is required to prop up falsehood, and that errors, and absurd follies form the constitution and texture of society.

Taking the aggregate of the pains and pleasures which man experiences through life, whatever may be his rank or condition, the probability is, that he is one of the least happy of all the animals that come under our observation; and this preponderance of evil, which few will dispute, is chiefly occasioned by his egregious departure from nature, in his education, religion, laws, and customs, from which have sprung all the follies of his known and acknowledged credulity: for all experience shows that nothing is more facile than to make him believe the greatest absurdities, under the imposing names of sanctified mysteries, after having imbued him from his infancy with maxims calculated to suppress his reasoning powers—to prevent him from examining that which he is told he must believe, on the authority of the

church, and that of his forefathers.* This tyranny over the mind is not confined to Christendom, but exists wherever men have been weak and silly enough to support an expensive and luxurious priesthood; witness the extent of countries, and the millions of human beings who, *faithfully*, and without examination, have adopted the crafty dreams, the rank and bold absurdities, of that most successful of all impostors, Mahomet, who well knew the endless credulity of the human mind,

* Oh wearisome condition of humanity !
 Born under one law, to another bound ;
 Vainly begot, and yet forbidden vanity,
Created sick, commanded to be sound.
 What meaneth nature by these diverse laws ?
 Passion and reason, self-division cause.

Is it the mark or majesty of power
 To make offences that it may forgive ?
 Nature herself doth her own self deflower,
 To hate those errors she herself doth give ;
 For how should man think that he may not do,
 If nature did not fail and punish too ?

We that are bound by vows and by promotion,†
 With pomp of holy sacrifice and rites,
 To teach belief in good and still devotion,
 To preach of heaven's wonders and delights ;
 Yet when each of us in his own heart looks,
He finds the God there, far unlike his books.

‘ *Chorus Sacerdotum.*’

† Priests.

and the difficulty there is in *not* believing those things that claim a supernatural original, though there be neither sense, argument, nor reason to confirm them.

Our divines tell us, perhaps in the way of allegory, that the Almighty Being is said frequently to swear, and even to swear in wrath; that he smiles, loves, hates, gives, receives, wrestles, fights, &c.; but having no superior, whom can he invoke or swear by? unless, like the Jupiter of old, he shakes his imperial curls in token of swearing by himself.*

The only way to account for this theological nonsense is, that everything said of the All-ruling Power, by priests, is borrowed from the passions and conduct of men towards each other; and vainly endeavouring to establish an analogy that is not only vicious and imperfect, but perfectly ridiculous. But even here they stop not, for wicked priests have represented the Supreme Being under opposite characters, causing him to make a will, or testament, which he afterwards revokes (as a man does), and makes another, giving rules of conduct in one that, are contrary to those of the other.† In this

* Vide Iliad.

† If God always acts for the good of his creatures, what reason can be assigned why he should not, from the beginning, have dis-

case, as in all similar cases, the revoked will ought to have no validity; yet our priests make use of either the one or the other, just as it serves their interest; telling us, almost in the same breath, that God has a body, and that he has no body; yet still possessing a spiritual body, having the form and likeness of man's body, in which he underwent incarnation!!*

covered such things as make for their good, but defer the doing of it till the time of Tiberius; and then, that the same God should receive satisfaction from, and give satisfaction to, the same God; and that the same God, who thus receives and gives satisfaction, should neither give nor receive any satisfaction, since the Holy Ghost, the same God with God the Father, and God the Son, neither gives nor receives any satisfaction."

* The French priest, Menot, tells a ludicrous story about the incarnation. He says "that from all eternity God had made up his mind to send his Son for the salvation of the human race, but was resolved that this boon should not be granted without much entreaty on the part of some great personages; and Adam, Enos, Enoch, Noah, Moses, David, &c., having failed successively in their embassy, they resolved to send some female ambassadors. Madame Eve presented herself first, to whom God made answer, "Eve, thou hast sinned, thou art not worthy of my Son." Afterwards they sent Madame Sarah, who cried "O God, do thou help us;" but God said, "thou hast rendered thyself unworthy of it by the incredulity thou shew'dst when I informed thee that thou shouldst be the mother of Isaac." The third was Madame Rebecca, to whom God said, "thou hast done a great injury to Esau, in favour of Jacob." The fourth was Madame Judith, to whom God said, "thou art an assassin." The fifth was Madame Esther, to whom he said, "thou hast been too great a coquette; thou hast

When men eminent for learning and abilities can with seeming seriousness maintain assertions so perfectly contradictory of each other, using all the powers of eloquence in their defence, and hold forth such wild and whimsical doctrines to the ignorant and credulous, as being the word of the Supreme Power, there is no wonder that they become confounded and stupified in the maze of such absolute contradictions.

“For zealous crowds in ignorance adore,
And still the less they know, they fear the more.”

Such irrational notions and opinions amongst mankind are evidently founded in, and are the fruits of a pernicious education, infused into them as well traditionally as from books, confirmed by habit and example, and enforced by authority, to the exclusion of examination, which rarely takes place, as they are considered as inviolable from respect to their progenitors, and indubitable, because it is never permitted to question them: it is therefore not surprising that very few indeed have the intrepidity to examine their basis.*

spent thy time in dressing thyself to please Ahasuerus.” At length they sent the chamber-maid, Mary, who was only fourteen years of age. She cast down her eyes with a bashful countenance, kneeled, — — —, and was completely successful.”

* It is by stimulating mankind to inquiry that they must be freed from the shackles of superstition. The reign of the priesthood

The total departure from nature and truth in matters of religion, has never been known to originate amongst the common people, for in every instance the new inventions of revelation, and other changes from bad to worse, have sprung up in the sacerdotal order, or with knaves who aspire to it; and therefore, this crime ought to be imputed solely to them, together with political rulers, who act with them for the same corrupt and fallacious end, in every country; and not to the populace, who, moulded by habit and authority, are reduced to passive obedience. And when we look back to the bottomless fountain of the ethnical superstitions of antiquity, out of which has been sewered down to us, the more turbid stream of modern folly and absurdity, it seems hopeless to find a thread of truth, by the assistance of which the abused laity may extricate themselves from the labyrinth of error, in which the great mass of them have all along been immersed, otherwise than by a total

will cease when men cease to be ignorant and credulous. Then shall we see

“Religion’s pomp made desolate by the scorn
Of wisdom’s faintest smile.”

Credulity is the offspring of ignorance, and
Superstition is the child of credulity.

change in society, a radical recurrence to nature and reason, for they may be assured that the clergy of all denominations will, for the sake of the good things they enjoy, "Maintain those doctrines which maintain them." Can these men, I say, under all the temptations and interested prejudices this world affords, be proper persons for the laity to depend on in matters equally unknown to all?—or, are they, who are not permitted to choose their own religion, fit to choose a religion for others?

A very intelligent author has observed, that "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 of a better cause. The people, ever fond of turbulence, entered into quarrels they could not 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

* From the very few fragments of the best pagan writers which Eusebius, and other fathers of the church have suffered to come down to us, it clearly appears that the ancient term God, or any other appellative such as the I-a-ho of the Phœnicians, (which Moses turned into Jehovah), the Isis, or Knef, of the Egyptians; the Zeus, or Jupiter of the Greeks, &c., all of them being expressive of power in the superlative degree meant nothing more than a *Personification of Nature*, as the whole, or all-in-all; and the inferior train of subaltern gods and goddesses signified the different physical powers of nature.

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 excite laughter in a posterity not indeed much wiser than they were."

If there is a law of nature, it can be no other than the religion of nature, with the observance of which the Supreme Power will not dispense, either in itself, or in its creatures; and no religion can be true that, in the most minute circumstance, is contrary to its invariable righteousness: and certainly nothing can be a greater libel on that only true religion, than to suppose it does not contain such internal marks, as will, even to the meanest capacity, distinguish it from all the false religions that now distract the world; so as that a man, although unable to read in his mother tongue, may, without pinning his faith on any set of priests, know what the Almighty Power requires of him. But, under the present mental bondage, the mass of the people will be enabled to know this only by a fearless search after truth, under the guidance of unerring reason: in place of which, they hitherto have, from sloth and blind obedience, examined none of the marvellous things they have been taught, but like beasts of burden, patiently crouched down, and

with donkey indifference, have undergone whatever their oppressors have laid upon them.

When commonly received notions are attacked, and which cannot be defended, because they have no foundation in truth and reason, the usual cry and alarm is—“ Why will you pull down these, and substitute nothing in their place, to overawe and keep the multitude in order ?” The answer to this question is, that we have 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 Spaniards and Portuguese, are alike distinguished by their bigotry and corruption of manners ; the clergy themselves show 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, science, good examples, rewards, and equitable punishments,—all these produce the most excellent morals ; ‘ whereas, when chimeras only are opposed to the irregularities of mankind, they are not capable of vanquishing their inclinations : error *must* be removed before truth can take its place, for they cannot exist for a single moment together ; and in the present case we have only to remove the rotten materials of a false and groundless fabric,

to make way for truth and the eternal reason of things.

The Epicureans of old were the chief sect who held, and taught the mortality of the soul ; yet notwithstanding this opinion, they were generally esteemed as the most exemplary and virtuous of all the ancients, and the most noted for the value of their moral actions. We may gather from the writings of Cicero and Diogenes Laertius, that they did more scrupulously observe the laws, piety, and fidelity among men, than any other sect whatsoever, not excepting even the stoicks themselves. They held that a man was either good or bad according to education and custom : being above all others strict observers of truth and honesty, they were often chosen to manage the inheritances of orphans, and it was common with them to rear and educate, at their own expense, the children of deceased friends : their known integrity frequently procured for them offers from the Roman Consuls and Emperors, to fill places of high employments and trusts, but these offers were often declined, from the strong desire they had to lead private lives, free from care and anxiety : they were not ambitious, for where a future state is utterly denied, there could be but little desire for posthumous renown.

But in modern times society is in a great measure

destitute of such pure morality, all being mixed up with the ever-changing alloy of theology, which is consistent in nothing but its exclusive interests, and in forbidding all inquiry into its mysteries. It has dictated creeds for the bulk of mankind in all countries, followed up by the assertion, that what is generally believed must be true ; but this will hold good only when men shall take nature, reason, and experience, alone for their guides. Of this grand truth many instances might be adduced, such as the following :—Before the times of Copernicus and the famous Galileo, men were taught by their priests that the sun revolved round the earth, that the latter was flat like a table, and one-third longer than it was broad, and hence our terms of longitude and latitude. Copernicus showed the absurd falsity of these notions, and taught that the sun was the centre of his own, or, what is called the solar, system, and that the earth had a double motion—in revolving on its own centre, and also round the sun. But knowing of the hosts of priests who were ready to pounce upon him, if he discovered these truths openly, he never could be prevailed upon to publish his works until near the time of his death, and he lived just long enough to receive a corrected copy of them. Galileo, at the distance of more than a hundred years after the former, offended the holy conclave still more, in asserting, that

the sole cause of the appearance of day and night, was owing to the earth's revolution on its own axis in twenty-four hours. These, and many other scientific discoveries of this great man, drew down upon his head the implacable vengeance of the whole Catholic church, and he was condemned by that wicked conclave which calls itself holy, for daring to know and to propogate truths that are now known to every school-boy.*

These well-attested facts ought to press strongly on every unprejudiced mind, leaving the lasting effect of showing that all such great luminaries in science, for the developement of natural truths, are still as unpalatable to clerical dominion, as ever they were at any former period. But to the great detriment of that dominion, the day of burning at the stake has now passed away in the reformed countries of Europe, and the light of nature and reason have happily gained some ground; and science, whose foundation is truth, has ventured to clip the wings of the demon of ecclesiastical power; but nothing can be more certain than that the ever-living thirst after this

* All that could be done in favor of Galileo, by the greatest and most learned men of his time, was merely to save him from being burnt by the priests: he was confined for life, and died a prisoner of the inquisition.

Anaxagoras was prosecuted by the theologians of his time, for daring to assert that the sun was bigger than the Peloponnesus!!

power, with the free inquisitorial exercise of it, will for ever be the same in the officers of all superstitions, so long as man shall have the folly to maintain an hireling priesthood, to drain his purse and enslave his mind.

A modern philosopher has observed, that it was evidently from the *Timæus*, and other writings of Plato, that the early fathers of the Christian church fabricated their trinity, and were generally instructed in the arts of mystery and ambiguity; and hence they have called him divine, for furnishing them with three hypostases, or existencies, by personifying the goodness, wisdom, and power of the Supreme Being, that is, by converting these divine attributes into so many persons. Thus, by perverting and twisting the obscure physicks of this philosopher to suit their own spiritual fantasy, they have contrived to fit up their trinity, and thereby to establish one of their strongest holds over the vulgar mind. Other grounds of the Christian trinity have been found in the writings of Plato, as when he says, “the son, the wonderful producer of good;” but here, under a kind of punning metaphor, it is evident he alludes to the sun which we behold, and which he calls “the most sensible image of, or most eximious representation of that supreme God, or all ruling power, of which the sun was only a representative, but forming a most glorious part of the

unbounded all-in-all. The “*word*” comes next to complete the Platonic trinity,* and, by this, in all probability, he meant only to signify the nature of all earthly things, metaphorically represented by the god Pan, or Mercury, who according to pagan mythology, was the “*word*” of Jupiter, the then supreme god. However, out of these materials, the early Christian fathers drew the idea, and contrived to get up their trinity, from the writings of a heathen philosopher, who would sometimes require a revelation to explain him.† But his obscurity may easily be

* 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, chap. 5, v. 7, never appeared till the *second* edition of Erasmus’s New Testament, about 1560. The 1st edition was printed in 1514, and the text alluded to IS NOT IN IT.

† Even the idea of Mediator is borrowed from the famous Zoroastes, or Zoroaster of Persia, who, according to Plutarch, taught, that there existed two principles, one of good, and the other evil; the first was called Oromazus, or Oromasdes, *the Ancient of Days*, being the principle of good or light; the other, Arimanes, was the genius of evil and darkness. Between these two he placed a third power, called Mithras, to which the Persians gave the name of *Mediator*, and this Mithras, or Mediator, was no other than the physical sun, which we behold, and which was also called Triple, either from power, wisdom, and goodness, or from heat, light, and influence. Oromazus is the name which the followers of Zoroaster gave to the Supreme Being, and which signifies, in the Chaldean language, a burning light. The bad principle, Arimanes, signifies *my enemy*, or cunning and deceitful. From these principles of good

accounted for, inasmuch that even in his day the influence of the priests made it dangerous to speak those truths which exposed their arts; for if he had expressed in full and clear terms the convictions of his great and luminous mind, he could not have escaped the fate of his master Socrates, who (it cannot be too often repeated), was put to death at the instigation of the Athenian priests, for his adherence to truth.

The ancient Brahmins of India were probably the first who corrupted human society by the invention of spiritual, or celestial existencies; and all the successive religions that have sprung up in the west, (and they have been many in number), have adopted the same machinery, varied according to time and place. And from the past we are warranted in concluding that new religions will always be springing up, all inimical to truth and reason, nineteen in every twenty of which will fail to take root, and a very few, from particular circumstances, will be successful and flourish for a time—perhaps for many centuries—and then be exploded in their turn, to make place for others invented to suit the interested

and evil were taken also, the Osiris and Typhon of the Egyptians, the Jupiter and Pandora of the Greeks, the Jehovah and Satan of the Jews, as well as the God and Devil of the Christians. The idea of a Mediator is not only derogatory of, but virtually denies, the infinite mercy of the Supreme Power.

views of theologians, leagued with tyrannical governments.

In such a manner have mankind been always abused, and as there seems to be, unhappily, a large portion of credulity in man's very nature, which easily subjects him to such thralldom of the mind, nothing but the strongest efforts of natural reason, aided by the impartial school of experience, and the utter exclusion of all artificial religions, can enable him to overthrow the altars of error, and guide him in the paths enlightened by nature and common sense ; for it may be taken as a general rule, that whatever is contrary to nature is against reason, and whatever is against reason ought be rejected as absurd.

To the free and unprejudiced inquirer, it cannot but appear perfectly plain, that in Christian society, from the earliest times, theology has ever exerted itself in the suppression of all natural truths of the higher order, wherever man has had the genius to discover them, in-somuch as virtually to admit that any deep knowledge of nature, is so incongruous with theology, that they can have no existence together ; and numerous instances might further be adduced, such as the following :—Virgil, bishop of Saltzburgh, was condemned by the church for daring to maintain the existence of the Antipodes. The great Descartes died in a foreign land, from church

persecution. Julius Vanini was burnt by the clergy for saying that "God is both the beginning and the end, without being in need of either; in no one place, yet present every where; he is within and without everything, his power is his will." For such tenets did the theologians burn poor Vanini; and the learned Stephen Dolet, was burnt by the inquisition for exposing the clergy and asserting the unity of God. Thus, in all ages, has religion been employed as an instrument in the persecution of great men. "Thus has superstition incessantly disturbed the harmony of mankind, raised up the most inextinguishable flames of hatred and discord, arming the infuriate maniacs to strew the earth with unhappy victims to madness and error;* peaceable and innocent victims, whose only crime was in using their own reason, and their inability to dream after the

* "The inhabitants of the new world were not treated as men, because they were not Christians. This prejudice, more degrading to the tyrants than the victims, stifled all sense of remorse; and abandoned, without control to their inextinguishable thirst for gold and for blood, those greedy and unfeeling men that Europe disgorged from her bosom. The bones of five millions of human beings have covered the wretched countries to which the Spaniards and Portuguese transported their avarice, their superstition, and their fury. These bones will plead to everlasting ages against the doctrine of the political utility of religions, which is still able to find its apologists in the world."

manner of their persecutors." All of which shows clearly the truth that, the wild delirium of fanaticism is as incompatible with the calm tranquillity of reason, as fire is with water.

Mankind will never be disposed to use their own strength, or make free inquiry whilst an undisturbed laziness, ignorance, and prejudice, give them full satisfaction as to the truth of their opinions; but where there is a sincere desire to elicit truth, she will never want professors; and she can never be wholly banished, except where human decisions, backed by power, carry all before them, putting men out of the way of truth by mere force of authority; for when the Magistrate, the Church, and the zeal of that numerous class who believe all that divines tell them, unite their strength, the three make the most formidable bond imaginable against the just liberties of mankind.

In the different systems of revealed religion that hitherto have, and now continue to distract the world, the dogmatical machinery of the various churches, have been nearly the same in all, admitting of no other proof than what arises from faith and ignorance; the first being a quiet and sottish submission of the judgment, to the guidance and control of others, who are deeply interested in the maintenance of those delusions which support

them,—submission of that judgment which the ruling power of nature bestowed upon every individual, for the study of her own broad book, in which alone is to be found the only true religion. “Father Garasse, of the Jesuits, declared that he could very easily invent a much better religion than any of those that now divide and disturb the world, if he could only pick up a dozen of scoundrels, who would submit themselves to be burnt in defence of his notions.”

A great poet has said, “that things naturally bad make strong themselves by ill.” So, in like manner, things that are in themselves absurd and unnatural, are not only strengthened, but rendered all-powerful by superstitious folly and credulity, which, in the fulness of their power, have shed oceans of human blood in support of fantastical whimsies, which have been turned into theological dogmas, that are inconsistent with, and entirely beyond the conception of reason, giving birth to the most rancorous spirit of discord.

If any man of an impartial and enlightened mind, should address himself to the contending parties in a manner such as the following—“The men who lived in the world three thousand years ago, appear to have been better men than you are, and had no disputes about religion, but served their God, or gods, just in any way

they pleased, and with the only union required, the union of affection amongst themselves,"—all that such a man would get by this admonition would be, to be called Atheist by both the hostile parties, and persecuted accordingly.

To arrive at the purest standard of morality, it is necessary that the minds of men should break the shackles of superstitious respect, know the limits which ought, and will, eternally separate reason from all the systems of revealed religion, and remove the obstacles placed against its progress by the corrupt legislator, the priest, and the fanatic; the two former will never fail to exert their united influence in fostering and protecting ignorance, as the surest means of giving stability to their power; and it is hereby that they render themselves the most cruel enemies of the human race. Men generally are more stupid than wicked; and in curing them of the errors which arise from sluggish credulity, we should cure them at the same time of most of their vices; and whoever endeavours to oppose that cure, commits the crime of treason against human nature.

The base and servile timidity which dreads inquiry into things reputed divine, generates a blind and scrupulous attachment to the superstitions imbibed in youth,

making a vast majority of mankind become the fools of the common folly, whatever that may happen to be,* and the more foolish an opinion is, the more readily will it be received as praiseworthy, and consequently, the more dangerous it will be to prove its folly.

Nature speaks to man in the following language:—
 “It is in vain, O thou fantastical being, to seek after
 “happiness beyond the limits of universal matter in
 “which I have placed thee; in vain dost thou expect it
 “in those fanciful regions which have no existence but
 “in thine own delirious imagination, which is filled with
 “capricious systems and illusions, the baneful effects
 “of an absurd education, inculcated in youth by selfish
 “and interested men, who have taught thee to depart
 “from the simplicity of my laws, which are mild and easy
 “in comparison with those of theological bigotry. The
 “tyranny of the mind is unknown in my dominion:
 “benevolence and humanity, the offspring of wise and
 “equitable laws, are the fruit of the soil, and imposture,
 “with his obscuring mists, are unknown in the land.
 “As members of society, be kind, be just, be virtuous,

* Grotius, in quoting Curtius, says—“The multitude, ensnared by superstition, are more apt to be governed by their priests than princes; and that kings and emperors have learnt this at their cost, insomuch that to produce examples of this kind, would in a manner be transcribing the history of all nations.”

“be merciful, and peace of mind will be your portion.
“But beware of the transient pleasure that arises from
“seductive crime, for it is I who punish the crimes of the
“fanatical wicked, who are blind to my laws, and shudder
“with horror at the name of truth and sacred reason
“—those free gifts which I have bestowed on man.
“Waste not, therefore, your substance in supporting
“priests, those costly drones of human society that
“eat up the fat of the land, spreading their useless
“systems of pretended revelation : but there is no reve-
“lation except that which I have, with perfect impartiality,
“made to you all, and which is perpetually before your
“eyes—the broad book of nature,—in which there is no
“imposture, and which requires not an expensive priest-
“hood to expound its mysteries, but only reason and ex-
“perience to conduct you to happiness. The earth is
“teeming with my benefits and bounties, yet ye starve
“yourselves to feed the locusts that prey upon you. Re-
“turn to me therefore, thou misled being, and let the
“basis of thy social laws be in accordance with mine—
“with the laws of that power which called thee into
“organized existence ; for of all the animals inhabiting
“the millions of globes which revolve in the endless ple-
“num, thou hast departed the farthest from me, as thy
“crimes witness against thee—crimes, in the commission

“of which thou standest alone amongst all the other
“animals.”

In such language does nature cry aloud to man, but she calls in vain, while he continues in the besotted belief of what his interested guides have taught about fallacious divinities, the splendid trumpery of supernaturals, and seeing visions, the workings of human fancy ; —while he shuts his eyes to the physical realities which surround him, and which never deceive his senses. Such is the language ever held by unerring reason, which is marked by the contempt and detestation of the priest, insulted by the fanatic, and left unexercised by the stupid devotee who follows those wild reveries that overwhelm common sense, and which man can neither practise nor understand ; making it consequently a virtue to favour imposture, which constantly endeavours to entrench itself artfully behind the rampart of truth. “ But the worshipper of truth will never compromise with falsehood—the adorer of nature will not be the apostle of deceitful chimeras, turning this world into an abode of illusions,” and by a total departure from truth, reason, and virtue, destroying the happiness of the human race.

On taking a view of the numerous traditionary religions which have overspread the earth, all pretending to

divine revelation, we readily allow the gross falsehoods and absurd notions which the priests of all have impudently imposed on their silly followers. Yet *our own* priests, forsooth, must always be allowed to be such faithful representers of truth, that we may as well deny all historical facts as doubt the truth of things believed on their authority. Priests of other religions, we know, will propagate falsehoods to support their own interest; and knowing that no revealed religion will bear examination, they take care to have them guarded by penal laws. But, I pray you, my friend, have not our own priests done all these things?

We have only to consult ecclesiastical history, to find that the worst of tyrannical princes have been the most sure of obtaining the assistance of the theologians of all religions, even for the purposes of carrying on the vilest and most barbarous designs, provided the interest of the church was promoted in so doing. And any prince, having the good intention to forward and protect the interest of pure natural religion, free from priestcraft and superstition, was sure to meet with their most rancorous opposition.* In mixing up chimerical notions in

* "The ambitious man, who is raised above his fellow-citizens; the tyrant who tramples them under his feet, and the fanatical priest who keeps them prostrate; all these several scourges of the

their religions—fooleries equally inconsistent with the invariable nature of the All-ruling Power and the good of man, they have even had the audacity to declare, that the common people will never be influenced by, or satisfied with, plain and simple truths; and therefore the supernatural weapons of inspirations, visions, conference with spirits, trances, extasies, miracles, and the fires of hell, were absolutely necessary to keep them in order: and from this foul source have issued most of those absurdities which, to the shame and scandal of mankind, have overrun human nature. “Indeed so doltish have the laity generally been, and so seldom have they thought of asserting their natural rights in matters of religion, that they have commonly sacrificed to the malice of the priests, all who have endeavoured to maintain these rights; and as often as the people have succeeded in throwing off one set of ecclesiastical tyrants, it

human race, all these different kinds of flagitious men, forced by their private interest to establish laws contrary to the general good, have been sensible that their power had no other foundation than the ignorance and weakness of mankind. They have therefore imposed silence on whosoever, by discovering to the people the true principles of morality, would have opened their eyes with respect to their misfortunes and their rights, and have armed them against injustice.”

has been only to become slaves to another. Yet they have ever been ready to join against any one who endeavoured to set them free for all theological tyranny.* In former times it is too notorious that, whenever a gleam of light issued from a mind capable of discerning the path of truth, it was immediately extinguished in the blood of its author.

It is a sad, and I hope an unjust reflection upon human nature, that in the most ancient times of which we have any records, as well as in the present, the bulk of mankind were held to be unfit to hear the truth. Clemens of Alexandria declares, that the greater pagan mysteries were open to none but men of superior rank, education, merit, and learning; and Varro says they were instituted for the conveyance of certain truths, which it was not expedient the people should know. Now, these mysteries detected and disclosed to the initiated alone the errors and absurdities of the vulgar polytheism, whilst they taught the union of the Supreme Being, or nature. Thus also Parmenides, in his *Exote-*

* Aristippus says that, "to be able to think is to draw upon ourselves the irreconcilable hatred of the ignorant, the weak, the superstitious, and the corrupt, who all loudly declare themselves against those who would take hold of, and maintain the truth."

rics, or books accommodated to the public taste, says, "fire and water are the beginning or principle of all things," as if he had acknowledged the creation of matter; but in his *Esoterics*, or books composed according to truth, he says, "the universe is *one, infinite, and immutable.*"

The origin of man (as we have elsewhere observed) and the ridiculous distinctions which vanity and selfishness have drawn between him and the rest of animated nature, have given rise to the wildest arrogance of conjecture, whilst what appears to be the plain and simple truth in this matter, has been kept as much in the background as it usually is in all points which admit not of demonstration. The origin of man, and the propagation of the species, perfectly resemble that of other animals, and the cause of the existence of all, is in the very existence itself. If we examine the actions and behaviour of many of those we call brutes, such as the monkey, the elephant, the beaver, &c., it is perfectly evident that they could not act in the manner they do, without a mind and understanding; and these faculties being proved in them beyond all contradiction, why then, O ye fanatics, will ye deny them this undefinable something called soul, which ye say yourselves are

possessed of? Permit me to answer the question. It is your excessive pride and self-love,* which are mainly nursed and cherished by the illusions of a preternatural futurity, which your priests buoy you up with, in exchange for the pampered luxury and ease enjoyed by them through your credulity. Well, you at last reluctantly grant that the other animals have souls; but in making this concession, you contend, as your last refuge, that such paltry half-inch souls as theirs, are not worthy to be immortal, as those of men are, and consequently perish with the body.† Here again is another distinction that is equally worthy of the pride and self-love of man, and of theological ingenuity, for it is the pure offspring of both; but the truth of it is utterly denied by nature and reason. This story of the soul's immortality must have been unknown, or at least not in

* Lord Bolingbroke observes, that from an excess of pride, man avoids and hates everything that in the least assimilates him to the brute, and consequently gets out of sight when he performs the business of procreation, as well as in some other humiliating actions, by which he seems to think his dignity is lowered, and which place him on the same level with the quadruped.—*Philosophical Essays*.

† “It is well known that even the Pharisees among the Jews did not openly maintain the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and of rewards and punishments after death, until about the time of Herod.”

vogue at the time in which it is said that Moses lived, since no allusion whatever is made to it throughout the books attributed to him.* It is true, that amongst the ancient Chaldeans, Phœnicians, Egyptians, and Greeks, a notion existed that the vital part of animals was immortal (which probably had its rise in the Metempsychosis), and no one could deny that this vital part was *breath*, since the body dies instantly when deprived of it. The next difficulty was, of what is it composed?† Some said air, others fire, others ether; and a fourth class declared that it was the requisite compound of the above elements, adjusted by nature, so as to sustain animal life; this was the *pneuma* of the Greeks, and the *anima* of the Latins, to which they attached no other meaning than simply *the breath of life*, in all animals; and when it left the body, at death, it was said to fly upwards in joining the lighter, or more subtle elements

* Aristotle maintained the eternity of matter, and did not believe that the Supreme Governing Power of the universe, extended any particular providence to sublunary things, and as for the immortality of the soul, it seems to have been quite inconsistent with his principles; “yet he was at one and the same time, the *Master of the Theologians*, and the *chief of the Atheists*.”

† When the theologian is pressed to tell what soul or spirit *is*, he is obliged to resort to the negative, by telling what it is *not*.

“Philosophy consists in stopping when the torch of physical science fails us.”

to which it belongs; and these elements being eternal, the soul, in this sense, may justly be entitled to what is called immortality. Philosophers reasoned after the above manner long before the time of Plato; but he gave a new light on the subject, by declaring that the soul was a compound of the *same*, and the *other*,—a most divine definition indeed! and admirably well calculated for the use of the fathers of our holy church; for out of it they could make anything they pleased. It has already been observed that, the obscure writings of this philosopher was the ordinary source from whence the fathers drew their mysticisms; and in this instance he has furnished them with the idea of those souls which the theologians of the present times traffick in, and which they turn to such excellent account.

The soul, then, is nothing but an empty term, of which we can form no idea, and which a man of a right understanding ought to make use of only to express that part or faculty in us which thinks.*

* Amongst the pagans, Pliny spoke the fullest and plainest on this subject,—thus, “After the interment of our bodies, there is a great diversity of opinions concerning the future state of our souls, or ghosts; but the most general is this, that they return to the same state in which they were before they were born. However, such is the folly and vanity of men, that they extend its existence even to future ages; and some crown it with immortality, others pretend a

In treating of impostors in this, and the foregoing lectures on miracles, the writer distinctly and unequivocally disclaims all intention of placing Jesus Christ at the head of the impostors of Christianity, because he is fully convinced, after the most impartial investigation of the subject, that the person in question ought rather to be considered as the Socrates, (*in epitome*), of the Jews, and resembling in many points of character, and persecuted virtue, several of the philanthropists of the present day; for, like them, his whole aim and endeavour was to release his countrymen from the superstitious thralldom of their priests,—to establish amongst them a pure and practical morality, and laws calculated to guide them in paths more congenial to nature, and their

transfiguration, and others render unto the soul of the departed, honour and worship, making a god of him that was not so much as a man; as if the manner of men's breathing differed from that of other living creatures, or as if there were not to be found in the world many animals that live much longer than man. Now these are surely but fantastical, foolish, and childish toys, devised by men who would fain live always; the like foolery is there in preserving the bodies. But what a folly of follies it is to think that *death* should be the way to a second life! Certainly this foolish credulity, and easiness of belief, destroy the benefit of the best gift of nature,—death. How much more easy, and greater security were it for each man to ground his reasons and resolutions upon an assurance, that he should be in no worse a condition than he was before he was born!"—*Nat. Hist.*

true happiness: that such alone were his views, is proved to satisfaction in the single circumstance of his having all the priests of his day as his most bitter enemies; and by them, and their blind-led abettors, he was put to death for exposing the irrationality and folly of their absurd systems. That such should be the result of his earnest exertions to benefit mankind, is no way surprising, for all experience assures us that, without the protection of wise and equitable laws, no description of priests that the world has yet seen, would have suffered such a man to live, and be the occasion of destruction to their trade; a consequence inevitable, because his religion was too natural and too simple to require a hireling priesthood. His doctrine was the system of nature, of which he appears to have been the enthusiastic admirer, as may be shown from many of the aphorisms and parables attributed to him; such, for instance, as that in Luke, chap. 6th, v. 48, where his intention is to compare the follower of the religion of nature to a man who lays the foundation of his house upon a rock; and in the same book, chap. 12th, v. 27, we have the beautiful simile of the lilies, evincing thereby his reverence towards the common parent of all existence.

As a follower of nature, he would have abolished

marriage, his aversion to which seems to have been notorious amongst his acquaintance, and what he says in Luke, chap. 20th, v. 34, is confirmatory of that aversion; but when he admonishes, as he does in Matthew, chap. 5th, v. 34, saying, "*swear not at all*," he abolishes marriage in the most positive manner. When he says, "what God has joined together, let no man put asunder," he assuredly means, that while mutual love and concord join a couple happily together, no man should put them asunder, because, in so doing he would commit a crime against nature, in disturbing the union of congenial hearts; but it is utterly impossible he should mean to include, or have any allusion to, the vast majority of marriages, which are cemented by Mammon and the priest, wherein nine-tenths of the parties turn out to be mutual torments to each other. He was no doubt desirous to render marriage that which reason requires it should be, viz., a simple contract only, and dissolvable at the pleasure of the parties; and so it was originally, until the usurpations of the church made it a sacrament, or divine obligation, thereby converting it into that which the generality of mankind have found it to be—a *life-lasting bond of the most woful description*; and so confessedly was it so, that the priests of former times took special care to preserve for themselves the

privilege of being exempt from its trammels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, state severally, that certain questions were put to him (Jesus) regarding marriage and divorce ; and it is quite evident that these questions were put solely with the view of entrapping him into such answers as would have been contrary to the Jewish laws, and thereby afford the priests a pretext for seizing him ; so he seems to have been on his guard accordingly ; but as to the precise answers which he gave to these questions, the three Evangelists are as much at variance with each other, as they are in almost everything else. He must have been satisfied, that if marriage was abolished, adultery could have no existence ; for the former unnatural yoke, is not only the cause of the latter crime, but constitutes its criminality ; carrying along with it at the same time, thousands of other evils which are entailed on a vast portion of the female sex ; —first, because the galling shackles of monogamy prevent nearly the half of the male sex from entering into a state, where misery is so likely to follow for life ; —and secondly, because of the false and preposterous odium which the perverse condition of society has attached to poor unhappy woman, if she follows the impulse of nature ; and if she resists that impulse, another abyss of misery is before her, and she becomes the prey

of a certain malady, in the paroxysms of which, the mode of gratification will not be much considered ; and if the necessities of nature find not a remedy, the unhappy sufferer falls the victim of a disease, *for the cure of which the world is full of physicians*. He must have been of opinion also, that prostitution is only a consequence of marriage, for without the latter, the former could have no existence : in short, he seems to have fully coincided in opinion with two of the ancient sages in regard to matters of love. Plato, in his republic, abolished marriage ; and Zeno declared, “that women ought to be unrestrained in their amours, in order that that their children might be equally dear to all men. Jesus evidently wished to annul paternity also ; as appears from the admonition he gives in Matthew 23rd, and v. 9th ; and he elsewhere declares that “all children proceed from the spirit of nature, or God, and in regard to himself, he never would acknowledge any other paternity.”

The principal impostors in Christianity (Paul perhaps excepted) arose some centuries subsequent to the time of Jesus, and they have fallaciously reared up, and ascribed to him, a theological fabric, so monstrous, chimerical, and absurd, as to be altogether inconsistent with his principles and views—with the generous exertions he made to

enlighten his countrymen in the laws of nature, and with the truth and simplicity of his doctrines.

He was a teacher of such men only as would receive the truth with pleasure,—he found few of these; but that did not prevent his teaching, or, at least, his endeavours to teach that very system that was afterwards held forth, and taught by Justin Martyr, viz, “that Christ (*or Chrestus*, which signifies any good man), the first begotten of God, means nothing else but reason, of which all mankind are partakers; and all those that live by or according to reason, though they are esteemed atheists, and worshippers of no God, are Christians; and such were Socrates, and the like.”

Every age, as well in ancient as in modern times, has produced a few of these, the disguised or oppressed friends and adherents of truth and reason, some of whom, in one way or other, became the victims of priestly rage; and others, from possessing less of moral courage, were reduced to silence, giving way to the torrent of power, which is chiefly supported by men who even glory in rejecting that light which reason offers to them; whilst they are ever ready in supporting theological speculations, which no one understands, and which have so frequently disturbed the repose of the world, through the stubborn dispositions of those who give

them credence; whereas they ought to be treated as inventions calculated to give scope to knaves and jugglers, to apply them for the purposes of deception.

The laity of the present day are become pretty generally acquainted with the audacious impositions of the church of Rome, and are astonished at the childish credulity of their progenitors; but they seem far from perceiving, or duly acknowledging, the very few accidental circumstances upon which depended the incomplete reformation of the church, which took place in the sixteenth century. This rested wholly on the honest, truth-loving boldness of two or three men, who happened to be more enlightened than those around them; and but for this fortuitous event alone, the mass of mankind in Europe would have continued in the same grovelling submission to knavery, and Catholic delusion up to this very hour. And how were these men treated and esteemed in their day, by the adherents of superstition? The exposures they made, and their writings, were looked upon, and treated by the whole Roman church, precisely in the same manner as the writings of Thomas Paine are now treated by the votaries of superstition throughout Great Britain,—“Not all the devils in hell,” cried the Catholic priests, “can equal the blasphemous wickedness of Martin Luther, and his impious adherents.” But

behold the result of this pretended wickedness ! The reformed countries of Europe bear witness at this day, of the salutary effects produced by even the partial victory that was then gained over superstitious tyranny. The reformers went but half way in the work that was required by reason and common sense,—“ they but scotched the snake, not killed it.” For in England, and in Ireland, the church still forms an incubus that is almost as grievous upon human industry as ever it was at any former period. Still let us do the reformers the justice they deserve, by confessing that, although they did only a half of the work, they wrought wonders, and it was perhaps impossible for man to do more at the time, more especially when we consider the extreme tenaciousness with which mankind adhere to the superstitious follies of early youth. They went great lengths in venturing to expose the enormous extent to which clerical usurpations had reached ; but any attempt at that period, to compel the clergy to relinquish all their temporal advantages, would have been fruitless, and would have made them fly to arms much more readily than even the attempt to *rend the veil* wherewith they concealed the truth.

A

DIALOGUE,

P H Y S I O L O G I C A L

AND

T H E O L O G I C A L.

“Man has lost himself in the wanderings of a fantastic imagination, in the fleeting dreams of fanaticism, and the malignant fury of a blind superstition; he has sought for truth where it is not to be found: his mind has diverged from the line of reality, and he has become the victim of innumerable prejudices.”

Ignorance becoming triumphant, begets credulity; credulity unavoidably occasions lies, and lies have recourse to force for their support against reason.

L O N D O N :

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MDCCCXXXIII.

DIALOGUE.

Lest you should start at these bold truths, and fly
These lines, as maxims of impiety ;
Consider that religion did, and will
Contrive, promote, and act the greatest ill.

LUCRETIVS.

STRATO AND MODERATUS.

MOD.—I have observed, Strato, that your opinions on most subjects are strangely at variance with those that are sanctioned by the highest authorities of the church and state ; and when a man differs so very widely in his way of thinking from the generally received notions of his countrymen, and those around him, his reasons ought to be well founded, and he ought to be sure in his own mind that there is no mixture of affected singularity in the matter.

STRATO.—The remark you have just made is very true, but if these reasons appear to him clear, satisfactory, and conclusive, it is quite impossible for him to think otherwise ; and one of our most enlightened

divines allows, that a man cannot believe and disbelieve at pleasure, inasmuch as belief is not the work of the will, but of the judgment alone, and arises irresistibly upon conviction; and therefore, to assert that a man is bound to believe either one thing or another, is so far from being true, that it is not common sense.

MOD.—I have no difficulty in granting your position, yet still a man may be a good member of society, fulfilling in an exemplary manner all the moral duties, and glide quietly through life, while he believes, or fancies he believes, in all those popular notions, which you are pleased to call the preposterous delusions that guide the great herd of mankind.

STRATO.—This is precisely the case with ninety-nine in every hundred of the human race, in all countries; they either cannot, or will not think for themselves; and it is in vain that nature sometimes sends amongst them a spark of her own fire, to enlighten the mind of genius and penetration, for every ray of the light of truth gives offence, and they shrink with horror at the idea of giving way to inquiry, so fettered are their minds with the bands of early impressions, the prejudices of education;—this uniformly applies to the weak and the ignorant, who are very numerous, and not always confined to the working classes,—besides,

few will readily “separate themselves from error, when vanity, the companion of ignorance, has rendered it dear to them.”

MOD.—Allowing what you have said to pass for the present, still matters are not in reality the worse on that account, for in every age and country of the world, the lower orders of mankind have always been weak and credulous, and their minds governed by an order of men who are appointed and paid to think for them; and this condition of things forms one of the strongest bonds of society, for its peace and security: so that which you complain of is so far from being an evil, that I am reluctantly induced to believe, that the more irrational and absurd the superstition is, so much the better does it answer the intended purpose; ambiguity, mystery, and obscurity, coming in as useful auxiliaries, and are indeed the main pillars that support the superstructure; so here is a positive good arising out of what you denounce as an intolerable evil. But, to change the subject, what do you think of the peopling of America?

STRATO.—You might as well ask me how the oak and the ash got there—who carried over the dogs, cats, hogs, &c. &c., for I am quite satisfied that the same power which produced animals and trees in the other

parts of the world, produced them in America also. But why do you insist on having that hemisphere peopled from Asia, when the proposition might with equal propriety be reversed, in maintaining that Asia was peopled from America? The plain truth of the matter is undoubtedly this, that the discovery of this vast portion of the globe, was a stumbling block to the theological worthies of our holy church, and placed a considerable portion of the ground-work of their edifice in a ludicrous point of view; for the heavenly inspirations of the early fathers of our church, did not, it seems, convey even a single hint of the existence of that immense continent; but since the restless innovations of profane science (which the church dislikes above all things) did make that discovery, the priests found themselves under the necessity of peopling it in the best way they could, and in as straight a line from father Adam as possible: so to work they went with all the zeal and anxiety which the untowardness of the case inspired; but, working against nature, as they always do, they have made a most bungling and laughable business of it. If bishop Eusebius, of Cæsaria, had been alive, he would have peopled the western hemisphere with more address and plausibility than all of them put together.

The thesis laid down is, that America was peopled from Asia, and the antithesis goes to establish the reverse; but both propositions will appear equally absurd, when we consider the perfectly different species of man found upon each continent;* for the white-skinned native of northern Asia, could no more beget the copper-coloured, beardless native of America, than a bull dog could beget a fox,—the Negro of Africa, the Laplander; the leopard, the lion; the ass, the horse; or an Esquimaux, a Hottentot, &c. No one species could by any possibility spring unmixed from any of the others, because of the specific distinctions made by nature herself,† and she has, in

* “None, but those who are blind, can have any doubt that the whites, the negroes, the Albinos, the Hottentots, the Laplanders, the Chinese, and the Americans,” are altogether different species, although they perhaps come under the genus Homo.

† The grandsons of Noah, as soon as they were landed from the ark, had a Herculean task to perform,—the sons of Ham, for no fault of their own, were exiled to the interior of Africa, and the coasts of Guinea and Congo, a distance of more than five thousand miles, there to beget a prodigious number of children of a species of Homo, entirely different from their own, with skins as black as ebony. “Magog, Tubal, and Gomer, after subduing Germany, Spain, and Gaul, had to propagate their own species in begetting vast quantities of children, with white skins, to people those countries, in a very few years. Even children in the nursery now begin to laugh at such obscene absurdities.”

her own immaculate way, wonderfully adapted every animal and every plant on the earth, for the particular region or climate, where each of the various kinds is produced; the pride and prejudice of man notwithstanding.

MOD.—You seem to have forgotten, or rather not to have read, the many goodly volumes written by divines and others, all CLEARLY PROVING that America MUST have been peopled from Asia;—since we are told from authority, which it is not permitted us to doubt, that the first human being was produced there by a miracle, and that being was Adam, from whom all the different varieties of homo have sprung.

STRATO.—All your deductions arise from your building upon false and groundless premises, and drawing conclusions from such premises as never have for a moment been admitted in the eye of reason; and as for your Jewish story about the first man called Adam, his wife Eve, and a serpent, to say nothing of its gross impiety, it is too silly and ridiculous for old women to tell in the nursery. A very few philosophers who ventured to exercise their own reason on this grand subject, “had the boldness to affirm that nature had *always* produced in America, the animals and plants that were proper to the climate and soil;” but as these

rational and home arguments struck at the the root of that old and rotten system, which our theologians are so much interested in upholding, there is no wonder in their taking the alarm, and endeavouring, by their usual methods, to stifle sense and the common suggestions of nature; and this they attempt by strings of ridiculous conceits and absurdities, which excite only the smile of the lovers of truth, but unhappily hold fast upon the credulity of the great bulk of mankind, who are ever ready to believe fabulous narrations, and take part with the marvellous, against nature and reason.

MOD.—Whatever may be the subject under inquiry, you seldom fail to reflect on the ecclesiastical order, as a class of men who are chiefly blameable for the apathy and ignorance of the lower orders of the people, and perhaps for their vices also; but this is unfair and illiberal, for priests are neither better nor worse than other men; and having been at the expense of learning a profession, which is generally allowed to be one that is necessary, why should they not live by that profession? But suspecting what your answer will be, rather than hear it, I will once more change the subject, trusting that your opinions on geology will be less offensive.

As the surface of this globe does evidently undergo great changes, apparently by very slow degrees, most of

the smaller islands appearing to be only the tops of so many mountains, separated by some efficient, but unknown cause, from the continents, or greater lands adjacent to them, to what are we to attribute such phenomena?—whether to violent concussions of nature, to earthquakes and subterraneous fires, &c., or to time, and the slow action of the elements?

STRATO.—Although no portion of matter can be annihilated, it is subject to continual change of *form*, from its own inherent, or self-existing operations; thus, that part of our globe which we call land, is everlastingly acted upon by that portion of its surface which we call sea, or water, of which element there is a certain quantity on, or belonging to our globe: and this particular quantity cannot, by any power whatsoever, be either added to, or diminished. This portion of matter then, of which the sea is the grand reservoir, is unceasingly in motion, and by a slow, but sure process, in co-operation with the elements of air and fire, is continually reducing into a loose, or fluid state, those particles which it had, perhaps millions of years previously, laid as loose sediment, and which, after being raised by accumulation to such a height as to be, in the ordinary routine of alternation, left by the sea, became solid rock, from the action of the atmosphere, perhaps

owing to the consolidating power of some unknown ingredients thereof. Thus the perpetual action of the element of water, together with the aid of other physical powers, is unceasingly reducing, or unmaking the land formed of old, in the manner as aforesaid (for it is a demonstrable fact that all high land is necessarily in a state of diminution), and forming other lands that will again be reduced in endless succession; motion being essential to matter, and one of the properties of its self-existence, of which it cannot divest itself. For a solution of your doubt, therefore, I see no necessity for having recourse to what are called convulsions of nature, to which the geological changes that have taken place on the surface of the globe, have been ignorantly attributed, for they never do materially change the face of countries, their effects being always sudden, partial, and by no means lasting.*

* The universe admitteth neither generation nor corruption, for it ever was, and ever shall be; if any man should conceive it to have been made, he would not be able to know from what material it was made, or into what it should be corrupted and dissolved,—so that the universe is without beginning or ending: but always remaineth in the same condition it is now in, equal and like itself: the evident signs whereof, are the orders, fit proportions, figures, situations, intervals, faculties, mutual swiftness and slowness of essential motions, numbers and periods of time; all things admitting of alteration according to progress. Now I call universal matter

MOD.—If the great changes that take place in that part of the globe which is land, are caused in the way you state, we must suppose a prodigious length of time as

by the name of universe, which appellation it obtaineth in that it comprehendeth all things, being an absolute and perfect collection of all natures, and besides the universe there is nothing, for all is contained in it, either as a part, or excrescence, and therefore it stands in need of nothing besides itself, being eternal, perfect, and permanent for ever. If we suppose the universe to be dissolved, it must of necessity be dissolved into something, or into nothing,—not into something, inasmuch as there would not in that case be a total annihilation of matter,—not into nothing, for it is impossible that something should either be made of nothing, or that any part of matter should be annihilated. Wherefore the universe can admit neither production nor annihilation; and there can be nothing without, or external to that which comprehends all things,—but men and other animals, do in a more inferior manner finish the progress of their nature, since they do not return to their first age, neither have they a reciprocal change into one another, as it is in fire, air, water, and earth; but after they have passed their several ages, they die, and are dissolved, becoming in the same state as they were.* These, therefore, are arguments sufficient to prove, that the universe remaineth perfect and uncorrupted; as also that the excrescence and results thereof suffer only a mutation, and not an annihilation; there being no such thing as *quies in natura*, all things being in a perpetual circular motion. Nay, that the figure, motion, time, and substance thereof, are without beginning or end, and therefore infinite. Nor hath man had any original production from the earth, or elsewhere, as some believe; but hath always been, as he now is, co-existent with the world, whereof he is a part.—Nature and generation govern all things.

OCCELLUS LUCANUS, *on the Universe.*

* “Quo non nati jacent,” as saith both Seneca and Pliny.

Note by the Latin Translator.

being requisite to bring them round in succession ; indeed it is almost beyond human conception the idea of the time required in such a slow process as you have suggested ; for we find shells and other marine productions on the tops of the highest mountains, and according to your theory, these mountains must have been covered by the sea, otherwise they could not have been formed by its deposition or sediment : and by the same theory, these mountain tops, so covered, and having these shell-fish remains upon them, must have been in a loose, unconsolidated state, like a sand, or shell bank under water, until they were gradually raised so high as naturally to be above the medium level of the sea, and then hardened into solid rock by the action of the more subtle elements.

STRATO.—The great difficulty, as well as the fundamental error in this matter arises, as you state, from unfounded and false notions about time,—notions at first invented and propagated by the sacerdotal orders of former times, and now chiefly supported by their modern successors, to suit their own ends ; they tell us that, something less than six thousand years ago, there was no sun, no moon, no stars, no earth, no matter of any sort, *and even no time itself* ; for they make God to say, ‘Before time was, I was.’ Now, by this bold invention of the priests, the silly multitude of mankind have not

quite six thousand years allowed them to account for the production of the stupendous order of nature which they see before them:—and having thus confined within the comparative period of a day, the very existence of nature herself, our theological rulers have prepared a suitable place of torment to receive all such of mankind as dare attempt to open their eyes to the light of nature and reason:—this place is exactly the Tartarus of antiquity; but to show that they borrow nothing from the ancients, they have changed its name, and called it hell.* The true philosopher will never find difficulty, or suffer himself to be hampered in regard to time, for if a million of years are deemed insufficient for the working of such changes, he will readily allow an hundred million, or whatever lapse of time nature required to work them by her own process.

“Dark flood of time!

Roll as it listeth thee—I measure not

By months or moments thy ambiguous course.”

The quantity of water on our globe not being sufficient to immerse its whole surface, part of it, perhaps about

* “The word *Cheol* has been translated hell (enfer) although 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 carcasses burned.”

one third thereof, must necessarily in regular alternation, remain dry land, but this land must always be by far the smallest portion of the globe's surface: and for reasons already stated, it is, as it were, moulded by, and subjected to, this greater, more powerful, and more active element of water; for the slow, but everlasting impression that is made by the sea, is aided by rains, rivers, and torrents from all the high lands, sweeping down the loose and separated particles to the bosom of the sea, there again to be deposited in the form of sediment, in the formation of new land, which will again become solid rock when raised so high as to be acted upon by the upper elements:—thus it is chiefly the power and dominion of that quantity of the element of water that is upon our globe, acting absolutely and perpetually all over the surface thereof, alternately making and unmaking land, by that unceasing motion which constitutes its power, and by which the process is carried on in a gradual, and sometimes in an almost imperceptible manner.* If it were possible for us to examine the bot-

* This system of geology is alluded to in the way of allegory, in the fable of Proteus, who, according to the poets, was Neptune's herdsman, and whose name properly signifies primary, or oldest, meaning that he represented matter, and the eternal nature thereof; his changeableness expresses the endless operations, and new modifications of matter, principally wrought in a fluid state by the unceas-

toms of the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, their surfaces would be found as rugged and mountainous as any of the great continents are, and probably we should find many mountains elevated to such a height as to approach very nearly to the level of the sea, and which will, in the course of some thousands of years, emerge above it in the appearance of islands, or the mountain tops of future continents, now in the progress of being formed by the sea.

MOD.—According to this watery theory of yours, we will suppose, for the sake of a case, that the Canary Islands are the remaining tops of so many mountains, all of which did at some exceedingly remote period, form a part of the continent of Africa, and of course that the peak of Teneriffe was a huge mountain of that continent; now, I wish to ask you what length of time this formidable agent, the sea, has taken to work its way so as to effect so wide a separation between these islands themselves, and between all of them and the main land of

ing motion of the sea, (Neptune) and the other elements: he was said to take all kinds of shapes and miraculous forms, as fire, water, monstrous animals, &c. denoting that in him was personified all the various forms and appearances produced by the perpetual action of the elements: he was represented as the servant of Neptune, and said to reside in a cave, meaning the vast concavity of the heavens.

Africa,—I will likewise ask you whether this separation took place before or after the flood?

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STRATO.—The peak of Teneriffe cannot be considered as any thing else than the top of a vast mountain, which, in very remote times did (together with the other islands around it) unquestionably stand in Africa, its basis probably still extending near to that continent, of which, some half a million of years ago, it must have formed a part, until a separation was effected by the searching and never sleeping action of the sea. In regard to the length of time that might be requisite for the sea to wear so wide a channel between these mountain tops and the main land of Africa, and such considerable channels between each other, I will not deal scrupulously with you, for if five hundred thousand years are deemed insufficient for so great a work, you may double or triple the amount. In alluding to a flood, I suppose you mean the monstrously absurd Jewish one of Noah, —a caricature drawn by the Jewish priests or scribes, from the fabulous floods of Egyptian and Grecian traditions,—but more on this subject elsewhere. ‘The highest delight of theology is the destruction of the beauty, order, and harmony of the universe. A world regularly existing from all eternity, and continuing so to exist through an endless futurity, would be, in the estimation

of supernatural theology, an object of disgust. 'To nourish the superstitious pride and folly of man, it is necessary to derange, overturn, and destroy the splendid beauties, and majestic grandeur of the vast empire of nature,' by preternatural floods, or any other mode of destruction.

MOD.—Whatever may be the apparent inconsistency of our despising the Jews as a people, and at the same time holding in reverence and adoration their sacred writings, we cannot possibly have a doubt of the divine origin of their books, impressed as they are, not only with the marks of the very highest antiquity, but commencing with the creation of matter itself; and hence it follows that all other nations, even the most ancient of the Pagans, must have imitated their religion, customs, and traditions, varying all of them, according to times, circumstances, and countries.

STRATO.—Just the reverse of all this appears to have been the case, as will hereafter be shown on the authority of their historian Josephus; and even by their Bible accounts, if we admit them; but the fact is, we can hardly depend on the truth of any one statement contained in their Pentateuch, as they deal in little else than the miraculous, or the marvellous, and their stories are scarcely ever supported by any corroborating historical

testimony. The first thing we learn of them with any certainty is, their slavery in Egypt, and herein for once their own account agrees with what Tacitus and several other authors have said on the subject: as to *how* and *when* they became slaves there, is not so certain, but from all that has been gathered regarding this point, the probability is that, as a wandering horde of the desert, they had entered Egypt for plunder, and were there made slaves for their robberies, &c.: they still continued to observe their own customs and habits; and as the begetting of children was always a primary object with them, they are said to have used every means to attain this end, living filthily and incestuously together, until they became so formidable, both from their number and nastiness, that the Egyptian king determined on expelling them. The species of leprosy they were subject to (all lepers are more libidinous than other people) was the scab, or scabies, as it is rendered from Tacitus, which caused them to become loathsome to their Egyptian masters. After this expulsion or flight from Egypt, they tell us one of their absurd fables, namely, that they found themselves able to take the field with six hundred thousand men capable of bearing arms. Now this story, if true, would only show them to be rank cowards, for, except in fabulous history, it cannot be shown that any

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king of Egypt ever brought into the field the half of that number of fighting men; however, it is certain that at the time of this expulsion, or flight, the Greeks, the nations of Asia Minor, and all those of the east, were great and powerful, while this outcast horde of freebooters wandered in the desarts around Mounts Horeb and Sinai, having clearly no dialect, except such gibberish of their own as they had formed out of the Egyptian language. Leaving this desert, and not knowing where they were, being as ignorant of geography as of every thing else, they wandered north-east through Idumæa, invading the *Hebrew* countries towards the lake Asphaltites, or, in the words of Tacitus, in the fifth book of his history, "*encroaching upon the Hebrew countries and borders of Syria.*" Now, mark well that, when Tacitus here speaks of "the Hebrew countries," he cannot possibly mean any thing else than the Phœnician countries, whose language was the ancient Hebrew, which had been in existence for many thousands of years before a Jew or an Israelite was known or heard of; at least this much is incontestibly certain, that as an illiterate caste they could know nothing of the Hebrew while they were in Egypt, nor until their invasion of the Hebrew or Phœnician countries, where, it appears by their own account, they were afterwards deservedly overpow-

ered by, and made slaves to these Hebrews, whose language they adopted and barbarized to suit themselves; and, agreeably to their usual endeavours to mystify and conceal the truth, they called this their bondage, or slavery to the Philistines, in place of Phœnicians.

MOD.—It appears from the sacred records, that it was the Hebrew language in which God himself wrote, or dictated to Moses, the tables containing the Decalogue and the laws, which were in that language engraved on tables by that legislator, together with all the books of the Pentateuch; and since all this was done by miracle, consistency requires us to believe that the Hebrew was already prepared as a language by God himself, and communicated to Moses for the express purpose of fulfilling his will; and this being the case, that language would very quickly be disseminated not only amongst the Jewish people, but also in those countries where they settled; this accounts for the Hebrew language being afterwards found in use amongst the Phœnicians, and establishes the antiquity of the Jews.

STRATO.—You did well in calling in miracles to your aid to solve your difficulties, as reason and the common course of things would not serve your turn. But are you not ashamed of the impious knavery of this Egyptian priest Moses, in pretending to be tête-à-tête

with God Almighty, and charging him with being a party to crimes and villanies so derogatory to, and unworthy of the majesty and power of the Supreme Being? The truth is, that since he himself and all his followers were born in Egypt, it follows as certain that, if he wrote any thing in the desert (laying aside your miracles, if you please), it could be only in the Egyptian language, because, allowing that he could write in any other, it would have been useless to his ignorant people : but the plain likelihood is, that with the connivance of his brother priest Aaron, he could easily deceive the rabble with a few hieroglyphics, cut upon blocks of wood or stone, and give them whatever interpretation suited his own ends. As to the matter of antiquity, their historian, Josephus, has conceded that point, for in his discourse against Apion, after magnifying his countrymen as being the first inhabitants of the earth, confesses that he dares not, nevertheless, compare the monuments of the Jews with those of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Phœnicians, as the air of those countries, from being less subject to corruption, was proper for preserving written records ; which is as much as to say, that as no other nations but the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Phœnicians had preserved the old records of their originals, he would not contend with them for antiquity, but only

with those who, like his countrymen, had no such records to show.*

MOD.—I have no difficulty in allowing that when the Jews quitted Egypt they might have few, or perhaps no written records of their own as a people; but you are not disposed to credit what they say in regard to the exceeding remote antiquity of that event, or even to admit their just pretensions to letters and civilization, when they afterwards became a nation.

STRATO.—There are numerous proofs in their own books (some of which will be adduced hereafter), sufficient to convince us that they had no books or writings of their own until long after their guilty invasion of the Hebrew country; and when, after a time, they had formed their dialect out of that language, and committed some of their traditions or legends to writing, these seem to have been concealed from all but their priests, and rulers, at least the neighbouring nations knew

* Justin Martyr informs us that Moses was the grandson of a great magician, who communicated to him all his art. Manethon and Cheremon, Egyptian historians, respecting whom testimonies have been transmitted by Joseph the Jew, state that a multitude of *lepers* were driven out of Egypt, 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.—*Josephus against Apion*.

nothing whatever of their writings, until the second Ptolemy of Egypt (to whom the Jews were then subject) demanded their assistance in making a translation of their secret books from the Hebrew into Greek, which was done accordingly at Alexandria, but in a manner so untoward and against the grain, and with such studied deception, that all the learned Jews of after times, and many learned Christians have declared that this Septuagint translation, which is our Bible, is the most faithless version that ever was made of any book whatsoever;* and that such was the result is no way surprising, as the eastern Jews of Judæa looked upon it, as a sad national calamity, perhaps more grievous and intolerable than any one of their many captivities, to be required to disclose the mysteries of that pretended theocracy which their crafty priests and rulers had taught the ignorant to believe in, as being sacred and heaven-descended. It is therefore not wonderful that the Jews, thus tasked by an authority which they dared not to resist, should deviate as widely from the original as the nature of the task would allow. The learned Jew Philo,

* St Jerome himself bears testimony of this, who, being engaged in the revisal and correction of the Latin or Vulgate version of the Bible, assures us that for explication he had recourse to the Greek version, and that he found those copies as defective, and as much altered by the transcribers as those of the Latin.

confesses that before the Septuagint translation, the Jewish writings were utterly unknown to other nations; and, as this authority is undeniable, how was it possible for those nations to borrow from the Hebrew books, which were not only kept out of sight and unknown, but of a very recent origin compared with the allegorical traditions and histories of the Egyptians, Greeks, Phœnicians, and all the nations of the east?

MOD.—When you deny the great antiquity of the Jews, and will not allow that they were either the most ancient people on earth, or the most in favour with the Supreme Being, can you account for the silence throughout the Bible with respect to the pyramids, in any other way than that they had not been erected at the time when the Israelites were in captivity in Egypt? If this is admitted as a fact, it will alone establish a very high antiquity for the Jews, since Herodotus tells us that when he travelled in that country about two thousand three hundred years ago, he heard various accounts of their origin, most of which appeared to be fabulous; and his account is corroborated by Diodorus Siculus. It is also remarkable that, although the latter of these historians (and I believe the former also) enumerates long successions of the ancient kings of Egypt, for some thousands of years before their times,

they no where, that I remember, mention the name of Pharaoh, which leads me to suppose that this scripture name must have been a designation common to a race of Egyptian kings, who reigned anterior to the times of the two Sesostris, Busiris, or even that of Menis.

STRATO.—Notwithstanding the evident endeavours of the Jews to keep their origin out of sight, there is some historical evidence, besides the proofs contained in their own books, all of which are opposed not less to the respectability, than they are to the great antiquity of their origin. The first translator of Tacitus into English, either out of compliment to the Jews, or to the church, either omitted, or stopped short at the account which that historian gives of that people; and subsequent translators have not rendered him fairly, inasmuch as Tacitus says that, “*as an ignorant people, they assented to put themselves under the conduct of Moses.*” And again, that by whatsoever means their customs and observances had been introduced, “*they have no antiquity for their patronization.*”

From the many proofs that may be quoted against the antiquity of the books attributed to Moses, I shall here for the present give only one, which is of itself beyond all contradiction destructive of any such pretensions.

In Genesis, chap. 36, verse 31, it is said, “ And these are the kings that reigned in the land of Edom, *before the children of Israel had any king* ;” which shows clearly that this first book of the Pentateuch could not possibly have been written until after the reign of several kings of Israel, and therefore it is only a fair inference to conclude, when backed by so much concurrent testimony, that it was not written until after the Babylonish captivity, and the restoration of part of them to Jerusalem by Cyrus, who gave them leave to rebuild their temple on their paying him a large sum of money (“ for many of them had grown rich at Babylon by their usual trade in old clothes and money clipping”); so with this encouragement many of them returned to Judea. After this period their high priests or pontiffs were commonly their rulers, and from this arose their division into opposing sects, the never-failing consequence of theological dominion; but having now the advantage of adding some Chaldean to their Phœnician lore, their scribes began to arrange their traditions for the short time they had been a nation, intermixing therewith the ancient fables of those countries where they had been in slavery. But first of all it was necessary to forge for themselves a more respectable origin than the true one; so they adopted the name of Ibrahim, or Ibrahim, as

the name of the imaginary personage who was to be the common stock or root of the chosen people. This name is famous in Arabia and other eastern countries, and signifies, in the Arabic and Chaldean languages, "*the father of a people*." The adoption of this name was crafty and ingenious on the part of the compiler, but his changing it into Abraham was a poor and petty disguise, for the names are precisely the same. In order to raise scions from this stock, Abraham is dispatched into Egypt,* with Sarah his wife, whom, as the story goes, he turned to excellent good account in using as the means to secure both wealth and progeny. This is the plan devised for the purpose of accounting for, and giving a respectable origin to this singular people, fabricated and put together after their return from Babylon, in or about the time of Ezra and Hiliah, who are supposed by some of the learned to have been the compilers, and

* "The book of Genesis tells us that Abraham departed from Haran, after the death of his father, at the age of seventy-five years. But in the same book of Genesis, we are told that Terah, his father, begat him, when seventy years old, and lived to the age of two hundred and five years; so that Abraham must have quitted Chaldea at the age of a hundred and thirty-five years; and it certainly seems strange, that at that age he should abandon the fertile plains of Mesopotamia for the far distant and stony country of Sichem." From Sichem they represent him as going to Memphis, to buy corn a distance of six hundred miles!!

others are of opinion that the whole mass was fitted up, and arranged in the order we now see it, under the superintendence of Esdras, and other scribes of the day. Now, as it was six hundred years between the time when the king of Assyria carried all the twelve tribes in bondage to the countries east of the Euphrates, and the time when the two and a half tribes were restored by Cyrus; if we add to this the time spent in their other slaveries, together with their chronology while they were a nation, under their judges and kings, we shall find a period of not less than nine hundred years (perhaps it was much more) between the time in which it is said Moses lived, and the restoration of the two and a half tribes to Jerusalem by Cyrus. Thus, the Pentateuch was not composed until at least nine hundred years after the time of Moses.

MOD.—A great deal of what you have said seems to rest on probability, or presumptive evidence only, which is not sufficient in a matter of such importance. You have no authority that I know of for alleging that the Jews sprung from a horde of banditti, who had been made slaves in Egypt for their robberies, and were thence expelled afterwards for similar crimes; yet if all this had even been true, they might still become the chosen people of God; and it is not for us to judge of

this predilection. As you have said nothing in reply to what I suggested respecting the pyramids, and the race of Egyptian kings bearing the name of Pharaoh, I suppose you mean not to notice my observation.

STRATO.—Enough has already been said to show that the Jews, but more especially their books, can have no just pretensions to a remote antiquity, and I have farther proof to offer in support of what has been advanced respecting their origin. As for their being the chosen and most favoured people of God, their own confessed crimes and horrible narrations, their barbarous cruelty and ignorance, and the contempt and detestation in which they were held by all the nations where they were known, sufficiently testify against them.* Their constant efforts to overcloud and disguise everything relating to themselves, by change of names and variation of events, has been so far effectual, that it is difficult to reconcile the greater part of their writings with any other historical testimony, and no person will deny that they are often at variance with their own statements, forgetting the old adage, that a certain description of people require good memories. But if we take

* Josephus informs us that the surrounding nations considered the Jews “the most stupid of barbarians, and that they had never invented anything useful to man.”—JOSEPH. CON. APION.

a look into Diodorus Siculus, we shall find what is very satisfactory, as what he relates to the following purport is perfectly applicable to the primitive Jews, being consistent with what Tacitus and others have written, as well as with their own accounts. He informs us that long after the death of the two Sesostrises, Actisanes, an Ethiopian prince, invaded and conquered Egypt; that at the time of this conquest the country was infested by bands of robbers, who were probably some of the wandering hordes of the desarts; and King Actisanes being determined to get rid of all such vermin, collected together all such of them as had upon trial been convicted of the crimes laid to their charge, cut off all their noses (some say their ears also), and banished them into that desert which is between Egypt and Syria, at the north-east extremities of the Red Sea; here they were in great danger of perishing from the want of water, there being very little except salt or brackish ponds around them. In this predicament, however, they contrived to live for some considerable time, by subsisting on quails, which they caught in great abundance from the immense flocks in which these birds make their passage, and this was done by entangling the birds in long nets made with reeds. As a horde of freebooters they now, by their own account, journeyed towards the north-east, taking

forcible possession of lands belonging to the Phœnicians, whom, for reasons already stated, they called Philistines, and, for the same reason, they have concealed the real name of the Egyptian king who held them in slavery, under the fictitious name of Pharaoh,*—a name which, if I am not much mistaken, is not acknowledged either in the fabulous or the authentic history of the kings of Egypt, although the Jewish books seem to speak of many of that name. But whoever amongst their scribes might be the compilers of their traditions or legends, they had good reasons for keeping the truth in the background, for if the real name of the king who expelled them, or permitted them to go, had been given, the time of their departure from Egypt, and the true cause thereof, would have been known by history, which would at once have destroyed both their credit and their pretensions to antiquity; for the same reasons, perhaps, they have nowhere, that I can find, mentioned the Pyramids, and as there is no consent or agreement

* It would appear from Lucan, that the word *Pharius* was often used to express any thing Egyptian, and therefore it is more than probable that the angry Jews gave the appellative of *Pharaoh* to their master, because he was Egypt's king, rather than as being the proper name of the man. It is true that Josephus mentions the name of *Pharaon* as being an appellative common to the male line of Egyptian princes.

amongst historians, or other authors, respecting the times when they were built, or of the king or kings who erected any one of them, but all is enveloped in fable : the fact seems to be, that they were erected long before the time of this king Actisanes. Another of the kings of Egypt, whose name was Nileus, so far excelled all his predecessors in improving the advantages derived from the great river, that, after his death, his name (Nile) was, by common consent, given to the river, which previously had been called by different names, viz. Eagle, Oceanus, Egyptus, &c. Now, at the time when the Jewish books were compiled, the river was known by its modern name of Nile, and lest this fact should betray the recent origin of these pretenders to antiquity, they seem studiously to have avoided the name of Nile, giving it the general term of river, or the river of Egypt, while the Euphrates, Jordan, &c. go by their proper names. In the 30th chapter of Ezekiel, the writer speaks of some one of the conquests of Egypt (which had no doubt already taken place), and in verse 14th he says, "I will make *Pathros* desolate." For the sake of information, I ask any divine, or commentator, to tell me what or where this *Pathros* was, and whether the compiler does not, by the poor disguise of transposing a few of the letters, allude to the famous light tower of

Pharos, which was accounted one of the wonders of the world, and was built by two of the Ptolemies, after the time of Alexander? So much for the antiquity of Ezekiel. In short, when all that we can gather from ancient history regarding this people, is compared with the very little that is rational and intelligible in their own accounts, it amounts almost to a certainty that Diodorus has direct allusion to the expulsion of the Jews from Egypt, for they themselves declare that they wandered in this very desert for a great length of time, confirming almost every circumstance and occurrence (except the rape of the noses and ears), as related by Diodorus. After the battle of Issus, when Alexander conquered Syria and Phœnicia, the same historian mentions nothing at all of the Jews as an independent nation, and therefore they must have been conquered by, and then in slavery to the Phœnicians, who had them in bondage three different times.

MOD.—You have said, in such terms as cannot be mistaken, that the Jews were nothing more than rude copyists, clumsy and barbarous imitators in the different countries where they were so frequently in slavery; but unless you produce facts to warrant such alarming charges, I shall continue to believe that you judge through prejudice, or at least too hastily, owing to some

apparent inconsistencies which are observable in their books.

STRATO.—No one will deny that it is quite in the nature and reason of things, that a people who were always extremely barbarous, more frequently in slavery than free, and, by their own confession, perpetually picking up the usages and superstitions of the nations which so held them in slavery, should imitate the customs of their masters, rather than be taken as an example by them. I have already noticed the ridiculous caricature which they have made of Ogyges,' or Deucalion's flood, and there is no difficulty in showing, by their own books, that the whole of their theology was taken from the mythological fables of paganism, particularly those of the Egyptians, fitted up and disguised by the priests, to impose upon the ignorance of the people; but the first and particular consideration was, to suit every thing to their own interest. In like manner the theocracy of the Jews, or their government by God, was made up of shreds and patches of oriental fable, absurdly strung together in a fantastical way, corresponding to their own rude notions of things,—

“ An inhuman and uncultured race, who
Howl'd hideous praises to their 'jealous God.' ”

MOD.—Let us for the present, however, so pass by

these things as to leave them with a retrospect at convenience ; and here I shall only observe that I can by no means agree in your contemptuous endeavour to make it appear, that the Jews have never been any thing better than the vagabond old clothesmen of the world, except during the very short time they held, as a nation, a small corner of Cœlo-Syria, and which, you say, they wrested by force from the right and proper owners ; but herein I am bound to differ from you so much, that I request leave again to change the subject. You will readily allow, I presume, that this globe which we inhabit is only a single speck, or atom, in comparison with what we see around us, and as all these immense bodies of dense matter, discoverable from this earth, and at distances so prodigious as to be beyond the mind's conception, appear to be governed in the most consummate order and harmony, we cannot avoid acknowledging that there is an Omnipotent Being who directs and governs the whole order of the universe.

STRATO.—That there is such a POWER, no man can reasonably deny ; but still I must affirm that no man who is free from prejudice, and capable of using his reasoning faculties fairly and impartially, will ever pretend to know any thing more of that POWER, than the very little that he sees and understands of the works, or the

common process of nature, which is daily before his eyes. Let the silly and contemptible pride of man impiously personify it in his own, or any other earthly likeness he pleases,—let him ascribe to it his own miserable passions,—let him charge it with having written, or dictated books of a shamefully immoral tendency,* and in a tyrannical manner, regarding the great mass of mankind, and partially to benefit a handful of the most despicable banditti, and such like ridiculous fooleries. But deluded man, with all his sottish forms, his idle puppet-show ceremonies, and with all his pretensions to heavenly inspirations, never can know any thing of that All-Ruling Power, farther than he sees it set forth and exercised in the works of nature. This is the boundary of his very limited perceptions, and when free and unbiased, the utmost point his faculties can arrive at is, a rational conviction that this Omnipotent Power is not distinct, or

* We are required to believe that from the All-ruling Power proceeded such immoral and malevolent desires and sentiments as the following :—“ Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow ; let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg ; let them also seek their bread out of their desolate places ; let the extortioner catch all that he hath, and let the stranger spoil his labour ; let there be none to extend mercy to him, neither let there be any to favour his fatherless children ; let his posterity be cut off, and in the generation following let their name be blotted out ! ! ” Here is a specimen of Bible morality.

separable from, or external to, nature herself; * and that the innumerable bodies of apparently solid matter that revolve in the endless plenum (for all is *matter* in some form or other), are regulated by the natural and self-existent properties of matter and motion; and in the mutual relation which all bodies, composing the different systems, have to their common centre, or sun, and to each other by the powers of attraction and repulsion: these systems appear to be in nothing different from the Cartesian Vortices. Most of the globes which we behold may consist of matter similar to that of this earth, and like all matter existing of itself, and therefore eternal, subject to change of form alone, which change of form is the necessary consequence of motion, one of its essential properties.†

MOD.—Men are so much accustomed to the *construction* of all artificial objects, that it seems to them anala-

* Amongst the initiated in the mysteries of antiquity, the term God was used only as a name expressive of an *effect*, whose *cause* is nature.

† “We may conclude boldly, then, that there is only one substance, differently modified, in the whole universe.” This is not an hypothesis raised on the strength of things required, or of things merely supposed to be true, nor of my own reason alone; but experience has spoken to me in confirmation of what reason continually points out; and thus I have joined them together, as the torch which leads us in the path of nature.

gous to suppose that matter itself must have been produced, or created, by an infinite power, and this power being itself immaterial, stood in no need of materials to work with, as it created every thing out of itself, that is, out of nothing.

STRATO.—It is just this superficial mode of drawing inference from the works of man, that gives rise to the idea of the creation of matter, because he cannot distinguish between nature and a clock-maker; for it is the invariable propensity of men to prefer the prodigy and the miracle, to that which is naturally easy and reasonable; and they either cannot, or will not, perceive the thousand-fold difficulty of supposing a time when matter did not exist, and that it was *created out of nothing*, to this plain, simple, and rational proposition, *that it did always exist in and of itself*. The word creation, in its common acceptation, has therefore no proper meaning, nor does it admit of any fixed definition, except when applied to the creation of new forms, from pre-existing forms of matter. We see nature, or if you will have it so, God, in every thing; and St Thomas tells us that, “*he is nature, and the agent.*” This All-Ruling Power, then, call it God, or nature, or by any other name you please, (for names are truly nothing except in as far as they serve to convey clear ideas, and that which is alone all

n all, needs no name, for there is nothing with which it can be confounded), must be in all places where there is existence; and is by, and of itself, every thing that exists, filling every thing, and leaving no space for any other substance: therefore, every thing that presents itself to the senses, or of which the mind can possibly form any conception, being material, or matter in some form or other, it follows that every existing thing is comprehended in this unbounded and Almighty material power, which has been called, or designated by thousands of different names, in the thousands of artificial, and ever fluctuating religions that have distracted the world.

MOD. —I imagine, as you have stated, that no distinct and rational conception can be formed in the mind, of any thing that is not material; and even allowing the absurdity of supposing that the mind can form any idea of a thing that is essentially nothing, still it does not necessarily follow that matter is self-existent, self-ruled and modified; for all appearances in nature seem to warrant, and even to force us to the conclusion, that so much harmony and order cannot exist without the direction of some infinite power or being, which exists not only independently of nature or matter, but having these principles dependent upon itself; and this power, or being, we call God.

STRATO.—If you admit that nature is the principle, there is no room left for supposing any other existence; for if matter and its nature be the principle, as such, it can have no cause, no antecedent, and must therefore be self-existent and eternal. But this does not suit with your favourite theory of a being which you are taught to believe exists externally to, or beyond, the bounds of nature and of matter, which is altogether boundless*; and this creature of your imagination, you figure in your mind to be *something* that is essentially *nothing*; and as names with you take precedence of ideas, you are pleased to describe this being of yours as an *immaterial substance*, which substance, you say again, is spiritual, and although spiritual and immaterial, yet possessing the form or likeness of a man!! An astonishing piece of impious arrogance, in which it is hard to say whether the pride or the folly of man is uppermost.† In regard to

* Since nothing is more impossible than for human conception to take such a mighty flight as to equal, much less can it pass beyond the first principles of things: that is, the self-existence, and self-ruled motions of matter.

† Zenophanes observed, that if the ox or the elephant understood sculpture or painting, they would not fail to represent the Deity under their own peculiar figure. In this they would have as much reason as Polycletus, or Phidias, who gave him the human form.

“And ’twere an innocent dream, but that a faith
Nurs’d by fear’s dew of poison, grows thereon.”

the inherent powers and energies which govern matter, all that man has yet discovered respecting them, are certain qualities, or properties which he has called by the names of gravitation, repulsion, attraction, motion, &c. and there are probably thousands of other qualities belonging to matter, which are beyond the powers of the human mind to discover; all constituting those immutable laws of nature, or matter, and of which it cannot be divested, not even by its own powers. And in all this there is nothing more surprising than there is in water running downwards, when left to itself, a property of which no power whatever can divest it. Thus, matter acting by its own laws, is the *principle* of principles.

MOD.—You seem to have a particular aversion to the commonly-received notion that, God made man in his own image or likeness, a fable which, you say, was invented by the priests, in times of ignorance; and in a cynical sneering way, you have elsewhere said that man has returned the compliment by making his God in human likeness; but this idea, even if erroneous, appears to be perfectly harmless; and if the pride of man has presumed a little too far in this particular, you are still compelled to allow that he is an animal far superior to any other on the globe, and as he rules all others, he must

have a natural right over them; and if so, they must have been made for his use and subsistence.

STRATO.—“This is as much as to say that, as noses wear spectacles, therefore noses were made for spectacles.” The selfish and contemptible notion that the Omnipotent Power, which rules every thing, made man in its own form or likeness, had its origin, no doubt, amongst those whose interest it always is to mislead the multitude, (the personifying of Deities being common in the remotest antiquity) by buoying up the false pride and folly of men, between whom, and their three Deities, they have constituted themselves as the legal and authorized mediators. Man differs from the other animals in the structure of his body, and is superior to them only in some qualities, which are greatly improved in education by the experience and combination of society, as may be proved beyond contradiction, by comparing him as the educated production of society, with what he is in the wild, or natural state; for in the latter condition he is so far from being superior, or formidable, that he hardly holds a middle rank with the larger animals, many of whom look upon him as destined by nature for their subsistence, and use him accordingly; and by the same rule of right that guides man in such cases, viz. having the art, or the force to subdue their prey.

MOD.—To say nothing of what we call a divine right in man to the other animals, his superiority over them is proved, in as much as no other is capable of reasoning or speech; of calling assemblies, and holding consultation for promoting the common good of society; of making written laws for the government of countries, and, under the protection of these laws, to build cities for national convenience and safety.

STRATO.—In society man has now before him the written learning and experience of his species for more than two thousand years, to which, if we add his natural ingenuity and subtility, arising from his large proportion of brain, we will not be at all surprised at his having subdued so many of the other animals to his own use and service: but in doing all this by dint of combination in society, has he truly improved his condition for the short term of life which nature has allotted for him? Are not the evils which spring from the present distorted condition of society, greater than its advantages? After subduing the other animals, has not man left HIMSELF, his own species to contend against, corrupted as they are by false and ridiculous systems of religion, by unnatural and iniquitous laws which, in a great measure, spring from those sources, and by a general hypocrisy and falseness of character, which pervades society from the

highest to the lowest?—Under such deplorable circumstances, let any man of candour and observation lay his hand upon his heart, and honestly declare whether his fellow men, and even those he calls his friends, are not the cause and prime source of all his inquietudes and miseries,—whether man is not the animal that he is obliged to be more continually on his guard against than any other ! These melancholy evils arise, not from any thing innately vicious in his nature, but from the accumulated mass of absurdity, error, and falsehood that has overwhelmed society, and to which I have already adverted ; but it may be farther observed here, that all this perverse degeneracy is chiefly to be attributed to a general apostacy from nature and in place of her plain and wholesome laws, men have substituted the arts of insincerity and fraud, with institutions, manners, customs, &c. the most pernicious to human happiness. In proof of this perversion of nature, take as a single instance for the present, the baleful effects of the laws relating to monogamy, or single marriage, so pregnant with mischief and misery to nine-tenths of mankind who unhappily bind themselves by them ;—love constitutes the chief happiness of all animals except man, to him alone it brings misery, owing to this atrocious law, now become still more intolerable since the ministration thereof

has been usurped by the church, where the priest, by a few conjoining syllables takes upon him to unite amicably together, dispositions of the most discordant nature, the union of which may turn out to be as fire with water; and that too by a bond which cannot be cancelled but in death: but although the priest may thus violate nature, he cannot extinguish her: his two persons turned into one, soon find that they not only continue to be two still, but that they are at all points opposed to each other; and then follows a scene of clouds and tempests, where there is no haven of peace, and therefore shipwreck or ransomless captivity is the inevitable doom. The only thing that could ever render monogamy at all bearable, would be the liberty of divorce to the fullest extent, at the instance of either party, but without that remedy the intention of nature is thwarted doubly, and the obligatory tie is a cruel and unnatural imposition, standing as it does in full opposition to those free and *voluntary* means which nature intended as the means of procreation. This glaring fact daily presents itself before us,—that, the horror of such unnatural trammels condemns nearly the half of the female sex to that pining, cheerless state of celibacy, that is far more than any thing else, abhorrent to nature:—in youth men will be blinded by the animal passion of love, which is com-

monly too strong for headlong inexperience ; but in riper years, people of sense and observation, who value their liberty, will not readily be induced to commit themselves so egregiously for life, well knowing that such a yoke, under such conditions, is in the highest degree repugnant to nature, which teaches us that, if galling fetters so contrary to will and conscience, cannot be removed or rectified by law, they should be eluded by prevention. "If law forbids the cancelling of cruel bonds, nature directs us not to sign and seal them:" and,

" Since many are so bad, 'tis wisdom to beware,
And better shun the bait than struggle in the snare."

It is remarkable that man should be the only animal on the earth that has had the folly to bind himself through life by shackles so inimical to, and subversive of his natural liberty,—all the others reason better in marrying during the season of love only, and the offspring is in little danger, save from the rapaciousness of man. In short, 'marriage almost always represents nothing more than the picture of two unfortunate human beings, who are chained together, to be a reciprocal torment to each other.'

MOD.—You seem to despise a beaten tract; and if it be truth that you are really in search of, you seek it only in

bye-paths which lead you to strange conclusions; and although you draw your premises from nature, many of them still appear questionable, at least so they will appear if tried by commonly-received creeds, usages, and customs; so they will not bear you out in arraigning the religion and other institutions of your country, or in your attempts to show that, by disregarding the obvious principles of nature, man has become a mere *artificial* animal in society, the patch-work of dissimulation and superstition:—but these attacks are ill judged, and will certainly gain you no credit, for even if the whole of what you allege was strictly true, yet men neither can nor ought to bear to be told such truths, because every endeavour to lower or vilify an established order of things, whether that be in itself good or bad, serves more or less to unhinge society. And you know little of human nature, if you suppose yourself able to convince a majority of the people you live amongst, that man is not the most favoured creature of the Supreme Being, who has bestowed upon him such excellent qualities of mind and body, as show indisputably his vast superiority over the brute creation.

STRATO.—I have no wish to deprive you of any of your consolations, whatever may be their foundation. Animal life is merely a portion of matter organized in a

certain manner by a hidden process of nature, and of this organization, thought and action are the necessary consequence ;* and that which the ancients simply called the breath of life, and we call soul, is the same in all animals, and may, not without reason, be said to be immortal, since it certainly forms part of, and belongs to that elementary matter which we call air, and must therefore be eternal. Those qualities which go by the

* “ Let us view man when within the shell, and when out of it : let us take a microscope and examine the youngest embryos, those of the growth of four, six, eight, or fifteen days ; after this age we may discover them with our naked eyes. Then we can perceive the head only, a round egg with two blackish specks, which represent the eyes. Before this time, all being unformed, we can see nothing but a pulp of marrow, which is the brain, where the original of the nerves is first formed, where the principle of feeling is first seated, and the heart, which begins already to beat in this soft pulp : this is the *punctum saliens* of Malpighi, part of the liveliness of which does perhaps already proceed from the influence of the nerves. Then we see the head by degrees stretch forth the neck, which being widened, first forms the thorax, where the heart immediately descends, and takes up its situation. The belly is framed next, which is divided into two parts by a partition, called by anatomists the diaphragm. These parts being expanded, furnish the arms, the hands, the fingers, the nails, and the hair ; the other gives the thighs, the legs, the feet, &c., with the known difference only of situation, which forms the support and balance of the body. It is a surprising vegetation, but not more surprising in man than in any other animal. Here you see the hairs that cover the tops of our heads, and there you behold the leaves and flowers ; the same luxury of nature shines throughout.”

names of mind and reason, in man, exist to a certain degree in all animals, and are even much more perfect in some of them than they are in man; but his excessive pride, and love of dominion, prevents his seeing and acknowledging this truth, while he arrogantly contemns all the other creatures; and his interested teachers have found out another name to express precisely that quality which we call reason in man, and this name is *INSTINCT*; a term which, forsooth, we must never fail to apply, when speaking of the mental faculties of those animals we call brutes, lest they should too nearly approach the dignity of the “lords of the creation;” and herein they are right, for reason and all experience at once confess the truth, that the sole difference is in the distinction of terms. To deny mind and reason to the dog, the bee, the ant, and hundreds of others, is as absurd and false as it would be to deny that the eagle had wings.* To judge of rationalty and irrationalty from apprehending, or not apprehending, the meaning of vocal sounds, or from silence, or speech not understood, shows a shallowness of judgment truly deserving of our con-

* When two rams retire backwards to a distance from each other, in order to make their blow the stronger, do they not reason as correctly as if they had known from mechanical art, that their strength is the product of their weight multiplied by their velocity?

tempt. You say that brutes have no walled cities, no written laws ; I answer, neither had men, while they were happy, and had not become victims of that society which is now monstrously unnatural, with all its train of follies and superstitions. If pride and prejudice would allow, man would see clearly that many of the animals even far surpass him in those reasoning powers of the mind that serve as guides towards preservation and health ; for all the grazing classes have a perfect knowledge of the herbage that is deleterious to them, by the smell alone ; but to avoid what is injurious, man requires generally to unite smell, taste, and experience, to guide him in safety : many of the domestic animals have a foreknowledge that amounts to certainty, of approaching atmospherical changes, impending storms, &c., for we see that they provide against them, and are never deceived. These instances show what may be called a utility of mind, or a degree of useful wisdom that leaves man at a distance ; and many others might be quoted of the wonderful foresight, providence, and reasoning* powers of those we call the brute creation.

* That defect which hinders vocal communication between man and the other animals, why may it not be in him, as well as in them ? for we understand them no more than they do us : and by the same rule and reason they may therefore despise our ignorance,

MOD.—The true meaning and tendency of your argument is, to establish the fact that the dominion of man over the other animals, is wholly and exclusively owing to the following causes, viz.—the learning and experience of his species, handed down to him, generation after generation, for more than two thousand years; his combination in society against the other animals; and the cunning and dexterity which his ample allowance of brain naturally gives him. But, granting that he has benefited by the writings of antiquity, and those of his forefathers, still those writings are the effects of the ingenuity of man, and cannot have any other origin, however far back you may trace them; and it follows that each succeeding generation have a right to avail themselves of the advantages handed down to them by their ancestors.

STRATO.—That the orang-outang and others of the greater monkies have never yet written testaments, creeds, and foolish catechisms, is no proof of their utter incapability of learning to write, and even to arrange their ideas; but this in all probability would add nothing to the comfort and happiness of their lives, since it

as well as we do theirs: and, following up the absurdity, we may call the Chinese beasts, because we do not understand them.—

MONTAIGNE.

appears pretty plainly that all the useful knowledge and experience of former generations is handed down amongst them (as well as amongst men), in a manner not undeserving of the name of oral tradition ; for nothing can be more evident than the perfect understanding that is amongst them, and which is communicated most likely by signs as well as by sounds ; and for any thing we can ever know to the contrary, that tradition of their's may, in some respects, be more perfect than it is with man.

MOD.—I cannot account for your apparent wish to undervalue the true rank of your own species, in the scale of animated being, while at the same time you cannot refrain from blaming them for exercising those powers of bodily strength or dexterity, which surely were not given them in vain, but intended by nature for their advantage against their enemies. If it is thus you mean to argue, it is wrong in principle, and in experience, for it is quite evident that if man had not, in some way or other, subdued the greater part of the land animals, they would have overrun, and exterminated his whole race ; so that his conduct herein is perfectly defensible on the strong ground of natural right.

STRATO.—Nothing can be further from my intention than to blame man for enforcing all his natural rights to secure his safety and subsistence ; and although I am one

of the very few who are satisfied that nature never intended man should eat the flesh of animals ; yet it seems a very common order of things that one animal should live upon another ; and the only excuse that I can find for man's degeneracy in this particular, is the probability that he began to kill and eat animals in self-defence, to prevent his being devoured by them ; and as soon as he began to relish this diet, the priests with one consent made the discovery, that the gods were much better pleased with the grateful fumes of fat roasted beef or venison, than they were with those of myrrh and frankincense ; so these innocent and bloodless altars of primitive simplicity were forsaken for those of the knife and the bloody priest, who, on particular occasions required the immolation of human victims beneath his murderous hand ;* nor would he have spared the gods themselves if they had been fat, and tangible. But what is most deserving of derision is, that silly fondness in man which makes him

* The priests of antiquity declared that their wicked and inhuman sacrifices were done by the express command of God.

“This is the origin of all those sacrifices of human victims, which have disgraced almost every part of the world. What father or mother could act so contrary to every principle and feeling of nature, as to bring their son or daughter to the priest, to be sacrificed upon the altar, if they had not been previously convinced, that the god of the country commanded the sacrifice to be made.”

believe and assert that all living creatures were made for his use; whereas his true right to all such as he can subdue, either by force or dexterity, is precisely the same as that which lions or tigers have over their prey, that is, the right of conquest, and no more. To account for this conceited folly in men, we have only to consider the early impressions that have been made upon their minds by that long-robed class, whom they have the infatuation to maintain in sloth and idleness, under their own pretence of being the mediators between heaven and earth; and while that idleness is supported by continuing the pay, (for it is the pay that makes the priest), the indulged party will, in grateful return, never fail to make man the most favoured of all earthly creatures, by the supreme power; and in doing this the theologian is sure to succeed, because he works upon the pride, the ignorance, and the selfishness of ninety-nine in every hundred of mankind, securing to himself thereby the fat of the land; for the small voice of truth has always been disregarded when heard from the very few who worship her for her own sake.

MOD.—I have listened to you with patience, and with a desire to elicit truth, but there are some of your opinions that appear singular, and too daring to deserve support; and, as I have already observed, whatever may

be the subject in discussion, you are sure in the end to throw aspersions upon the sacerdotal order, and the superstitions of the people; and therefore I beg leave again to divert your attention to other matters:—You have wholly denied the creation of *matter*, and you attribute the continual change of its forms, and new combinations, to its own inherent powers of modification, acting by energies and impulses inseparable from itself, one of which is motion; and that property, you say, is essential to it; but who communicated the FIRST motion to matter?

STRATO.—If you allow that matter is eternal, (and this grand truth is admitted by all the ancient, and most of the modern philosophers) you preclude my allowing you what you call a first motion, and the supposition would be illogical, after it is granted that matter is eternal, and motion essential to it, for then it follows that motion must be co-eternal with it. There can be no absolute rest for any portion of matter, and any change, whether organic or otherwise, cannot possibly be effected without motion. All things are so perpetually moved as to make it appear that there is a PROCESS and RECESS in infinitum, and although the series of changes that matter necessarily undergoes from motion, are eternal, yet no precise form of matter can be eternal,

all existing forms having been only renewed, or modified from the materials that had anteriorly constituted other forms; and hence is derived the only rational idea that we can attach to the word CREATION.

MOD.—There have always been, and still are so many thousands of conflicting opinions upon these subjects, as well as upon all sorts of religions, natural as well as those called revealed, that the impartial inquirer, who is in search of truth alone, is lost and bewildered in the endless mazes of controversy, and we are obliged to take shelter in Pyrrhonism at last.

STRATO.—Right reason is the best criterion of truth, and is a law befitting nature, extended to all, consistent with itself, plain to every capacity, and everlasting. I quite agree with you in the very proper observation you have made regarding the perfect order and harmony of the universe, which so pleasingly leads us to the belief that there does necessarily exist an all-sufficient, and eternal power in nature, which is properly the only object of the contemplation and admiration of mankind; and the religion arising from this source, and which is joined to the knowledge of nature, is the only religion that is rational, promoting peace and kindness amongst men, and requiring not the expense of an hireling priesthood:—this is the religion of nature, and no other is

calculated to pluck up the roots of error and superstition. But as for the numerous systems that have, and do still pretend to particular revelations, all different from, and opposed to each other, we have only to look at the fruit they have borne—the rivers of human blood that has been shed to support them against truth and reason. No sect amongst all these various inventions can brook a contradiction, and much less endure that their doctrines should be charged with absurdity and falsehood, and their ceremonies with vanity and folly; for in these points the priests will proceed to a degree of fury and hatred against their antagonists that is hardly conceivable, for attacking their honesty and credit, and thereby endangering the very existence of those arts and illusions whereby they secure, in ease and affluence, the good things of the world, which mainly depend on the belief, or at least the acquiescence, which their preachings meet with. All things are sent them from heaven, although it is evident they are human inventions, superfluous, empty, and often ridiculous fictions, frequently so far pernicious as to be hurtful to virtue and public tranquility, as can be shown from history, and all experience. If it is objected that it is not possible, that none of all their conflicting opinions should be true, it is at least equally impossible that more

than one of them should be true. Their opponents, the Deists, on the other hand, who cannot agree to the ravings of theological theories, are abominated and persecuted; the fierce devotee would have them prohibited fire and water whilst alive, and such is their implacable hatred that they would have them eternally tormented when dead, to effect which laudable and humane purpose, they have invented a suitable place for the end they had in view. Such has superstition ever been when vested in power and authority, and its cruelty and intolerance have always been commensurate with its power.* It is, therefore, *the reason of nature*, that every good and virtuous member of society should use all his endeavours to pluck out the teeth, if he cannot destroy this most pernicious of monsters, that has abused in a certain degree the ignorant credulity of mankind in all ages, and in a greater degree amongst the Christians ever since the second century.

* In the true spirit of persecution, John Calvin, when armed with power, wrote to the high Chamberlain of the King of Navarre, of date the 30th Sept. 1561, thus: "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 against us. Such monsters should be exterminated, as I have exterminated Michael Servetus, the Spaniard."

Vide Eccles. Researches.

MON.—By your own admission, antiquity will show that mankind have always been prone to superstition,—that they will stick by, and defend whatsoever sort of it was first imposed upon their minds; and although the ground-work of the ever-varying religions was changeable, yet notions of a supernatural deity, or deities, entered into all of them; nor can such indispensable apparatus be excluded from any religion that is calculated to foster the love of the marvellous, and the faith in prodigies, which is so much interwoven with human nature,—it is preternatural weapons and machinery alone that can act upon the hopes and fears of men in regard to a future state. Now, you would overturn the present fabric of theology, without substituting any thing in its room, to answer the above purpose, except the simple religion of nature and reason, which, by your own confession, cannot be appreciated by more than one in every hundred of mankind; thus you would not only loosen, but altogether untie those bonds which churches and states, with united power, have found so necessary to govern society.

STRATO.—A very excellent philosopher informs us, that—“In Pennsylvania there is no religion established by the government; every person adopts the one he likes best,—the priest is no charge to the state,—the

individuals provide for them as they find it convenient, and tax themselves accordingly; the priest is there, like the merchant, maintained at the expense of the consumer;—he who has no priest, and consumes no part of the commodity he deals in, pays no part of his expense. Pennsylvania is a model for other nations.”

In like manner I would have all religions, except that of nature and reason (which requires no hiring priests), made marketable commodities, so that every votary, or consumer, might supply himself at that preaching shop, where the article best suited his fancy, and THERE to pay the vender for the quantity purchased. This would be fair and reasonable. But to support the present profligate superstition, authority comes to stand in the place of reason, and is the natural result of the evil of having an established religion; and then comes the tenfold evil of the adulterous connection between that religion and the state, confirmed by laws which were no doubt procured through the immense wealth and power of the clergy in former times, when they secured to themselves peculiar privileges and immunities; and by the strength of that common interest, which is exclusively their own, and is the strongest imaginable, they formed a distinct state within the political state, in almost every nation in Europe, and these

sacerdotal states being firmly united, although at a distance from each other, were often formidable to the civil governments of Europe; and where they bear sway and rule in the executive of any nation, as at present they do in Spain and Portugal, that nation is doomed to the most abject slavery, to ignorance, weakness, degradation, and the contempt of other nations. Witness the present condition of the two countries above mentioned, where the two millstones of knavery and folly will grind on till some rational powers of genius shall start up, and rouse the people from their sloth and stupidity.

MOD.—In every age and in every country of the world, there have always been religions of some sort or other, and of course there must have been priests attached to all of them, to administer and expound; and when men of learning are set apart for a public office, a public expense will be incurred for their maintenance.

STRATO.—The inference you draw from the position laid down, is quite correct; but have the mass of mankind in any age or country, ever freely and impartially ventured to examine into the reputed necessity, or whether there is really any indispensable obligation on their part to support such establishments, which the

very few in every country, who are capable of just and wise reflections, know to be wholly illusory; and thus to encourage idleness and luxury in this numerous class of men, who eat up such an unconscionable share of the earnings of industry; while a vast portion of that property which ought to form part of the resources of the state, is ingulfed and squandered upon bishops, and other dignitaries, who profess to be patterns of all that is humble, poor, and self-denying, yet whose lives generally, are so many examples of the full-blown vices that stand in natural opposition to the virtues they profess; and it is through their powerful influence, the better to support that glare and pomp which dazzles the weak vulgar, that the land is groaning with churches in every corner,* with their heaven-directed spires, and

* To build churches and temples, says Zeno Citticus, is no way necessary, for nothing ought to be accounted sacred by right, or esteemed holy, which men themselves erect; neither among the Persians of old, nor among the primitive Hebrews, were there any temples dedicated to divine service, till at last one was founded by Solomon, for which he is reprov'd by the prophet Isaiah. Cornelius Agrippa also observes, that amongst the Gentiles there were some very eminent for the structures of their temples; but others there were who never made use of any, of which number was Xerxes, who is reported to have burnt all the temples of the lesser Asia, at the request of his magicians, esteeming it no less than impiety to enclose the gods in walls.

all the other expensive and imposing decorations, so well calculated to over-awe those who have been taught to think what others think ; not how to think for themselves. All this, taken together, composes the enormous fabric, called generally, the Church, at first invented by Priests, in league with tyrants, supported from the labour and sweat of the people, and dedicated to theologic visions and chimeras.

MOD.—With all your strange hostility to churches and their decorations, you never can make it appear that the people derive no real benefit or advantage from them ; for even if we lay aside the obligation of their divine institution, the mere erection of them diffuses wealth, and affords employment for the necessitous, who might otherwise be destitute ; and besides this grand object, we ought to make due allowance for the ornament and grandeur which cities and towns receive from such public buildings.

STRATO.—What hinders men from combining what is nationally beneficial with the agreeable and the ornamental ? Can we conceive any thing of greater utility, and at the same time more ornamental than the cultivation of waste lands,—the conversion of those unprofitable wildernesses into so many beautiful fields and gardens, all conducive to the health and subsistence of man ? In

England, the prodigious expense lavished upon the monuments of superstition, in the shape of churches, together with the church lands and revenues of those fatlings, the dignitaries, would alone have turned a vast portion of the waste lands in the kingdom, into cultivated and fruitful fields, and intersected many convenient parts of it with useful canals, and defrayed the expense of other national works of unquestionable utility ; whilst our ‘tithe pigs metropolitan,’* with their trains of subaltern drones, would have been taught to follow up the intentions of nature, by labouring for their subsistence in the cultivation of mother earth, or other employment that would be really useful in society. You have said that this order of men are not to be blamed for living by a trade that is generally considered as being indispensably necessary :—be it so, but I say again, let those alone bear the expense who are silly enough to be led to believe that such institutions are at all important or useful to humanity, abolishing all established, or state religions, leaving every man at

* ‘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 of the distinction 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 ranks, or distinctions in religion.’

liberty to pay his priest (if he keeps one) as it suits his will and convenience; and then the article vended by the preacher, will find its intrinsic value in the market. To render Ireland flourishing and happy, nothing is so much wanted at this moment, as the abolition of all favoured, or established religion, and a free trade granted in theology.

MOD.—The church itself has always insisted on the absolute obligation that states and communities are under, by the fiat of heaven, to settle permanent revenues for the maintenance of the clergy, and for the support of respectability generally, as well as to set the whole concern above any danger that might proceed from the alienation of the minds of men from its creeds and dictates ; and without some such independent provision, I do not see how any church could stand against the increasing numbers of those who are declared enemies to all the systems of revealed religion.

STRATO.—The most formidable enemies of all those religions which pretend to revelation, and the most daring exposures of their absurd dogmas, have come from amongst those who were educated for the church, many of whom refused to take orders at all; and others, from a rare honesty and tenderness of conscience, abandoned the profession altogether, refusing longer to be supported

by an avocation which they considered to be, in no small degree, inconsistent with truth and good morals; the supernatural part of it, which is nearly the whole, being a practical imposition upon the weak-minded portion of mankind. This self-denial, and virtuous dignity of mind in those individuals, arose from the rare coincidence of certain moral qualities,—viz., an incorruptible love of truth, integrity of heart, with learning and genius sufficient to distinguish between truth and falsehood. In speaking of the ill effects and irrationality of national churches, it must be readily allowed that there are many good and virtuous men belonging to the clerical order; and although it cannot well be doubted that thousands of them hold the same opinions that the honest infidels hold, yet this is somewhat excusable when we consider how society is constituted, and that falsehood is the present goddess thereof; consequently, being thus sanctioned, most of men will think themselves warranted in leaving conscience out of the question, when an easy and comfortable subsistence can be obtained by means which they judge of no more concern than a temporal convenience. This is speaking of the subordinate functionaries of the church, but how much more will those high dignitaries exert all their powers by every stratagem to reduce men's reason to those particular opinions which alone

+ Paley said he could not afford to keep a conscience !!

support clerical greatness, and by which they fish for their own profit and glory with so easy a bait as the gullibility of the multitude; whilst by the united energies of all, and the designing knavery of the greatest number of their body, they will use the most strenuous endeavours to secure themselves in the advantages arising from these abuses, until men shall begin to open their eyes, and the free exercise of truth and reason shall burst the mighty bubble.*

MOD.—The immense riches of the church, which constitutes its power,—the number, the learning, and the common interest of the clergy, will support it in perpetuity against all the innovations of reason and natural religion; but there is yet another sustaining power which will never fail to stand by it so long as mankind shall be propagated—I mean the devotion of the female sex, for whatsoever may be the system of theology, or revealed religion, that prevails in any country, the female mind clings to it without the slightest examina-

* “The wealth of nations has hitherto been wasted in the service of superstition, of vanity, or in accomplishing the destructive objects of ambition, but happily the power of superstition is gradually declining in the world; yet still a numerous class of idlers are aggrandized by it, and while that continues, it may again bring upon free nations, whether victorious or vanquished, the greatest of all calamities, the loss of freedom, and of public and private virtues.”

tion, with devotedness and fervour, exercising at the same time so subtle an influence over the weaker part of the male sex, that I confess having some doubts on my mind whether any one of all those religions pretending to revelation would stand for twenty years, without this never-failing prop; for it is equally important in all superstitions, in all countries. A learned clergyman, in writing to a female friend, makes this remark,—“if, indeed, your sex should enter into the irreligious notions, which now prevail too much among men, the next generation would be irrecoverably lost,” which is as much as to confess that the church is in no danger while it holds its deep-rooted impulsive power over the female mind.

STRATO.—I quite agree with the learned divine you have quoted, and his observation applies not only to the church of England, but to all fabrics of superstition grounded upon particular revelations; for nothing can be more notorious than that women have, in all ages, been the upholders of superstition; owing in the first place, to “their very nature, which is more weak and fearful than the nature and disposition of men,” (so says Hippocrates); and, secondly, to the fanciful and timorous notion of the superintendence of spiritual powers that are beyond the pale of nature; to which may be added, the gaudy and

imposing pomp of ceremonies, all of which, taken together, render the female mind as it were, a softer and more pliant wax to receive the theological impression. And hence it is that the zeal and devotion of the ladies for their respective religions, appear to be exactly the same amongst the Pagans, Jews and Mahometans, as it is throughout the Christian world. Strabo makes the following strong remark, — “It is a thing universally taken for granted, that women are the ringleaders of superstition; they tease their husbands into all sorts of worship of the gods, into the observation of feasts and fasts; *but it is a rare thing that any man, leading a single life, is found to be such a person.*”

I shall close my authorities on this subject, with a quotation from the learned Selden. “When priests come into a family,” says he, “they do as a man that would set fire to a house,—he does not put fire to the brick wall, but puts it into the thatch;—*they work upon the women, and let the men alone.*”