THE HISTORY OF ORACLES, AND THE CHEATS OF THE PAGAN PRIESTS.

Written in Latin by Dr. Van-Dale.

Made English by Mrs. Behn.

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To the Right Honourable,

JOHN, Lord Vaughan,
Baron of Emlyn and Mollinger,
EARL of CARBERY,
AND
Kt. of the Honorable Order of the Bath.

My LORD,

THE extraordinary Figure your Lordship makes in the foremost Rank of our Nobility, is too visible to escape the Observation of all Men; if Dignity was now again to be the Reward of Vertue, as it originally was, your Lordship has so many undoubted Claims to it, that are sufficient to enable the meanest Extraction; Your wonderful and universal Learning, your exquisite Judgment and Sense, which makes you the last Appeal of all Controversies, where Judgment, Wit and Learning have any Share, will justify my Assertion. But to have all these

[†] Noble
The Epistle Dedicatory.

Noble Qualities illustrated with an Ancient and Noble Stock, is a Merit that very few can boast, and only you in that degree of Excellence.

This I shou’d not dare to say from myself, as incapable of comprehending Excellencies of which I am myself unfurnished, but as the Opinion of your Lordship’s absent Friends, which is always the most sincere; and I have an undeniable Testimony of this from the Judgment of a Gentleman eminent for his Wit and Learning, as for his Respect and Friendship for your Lordship, whom I have heard say more in your Praise, my Lord, than I dare with my rude Pencil copy after him.

The learned and ingenious Fontanelle is the Author of this Book I most humbly offer to your Patronage, which, as himself confesses in the Preface, he took mostly from the famous Vandale, a Dutchman. The Original was large and tedious: Our Author has left out all that might swell the Bulk of his Book, without any mighty Improvement or Pleasure to the Reader, and so has made this perhaps, tho’ only a Copy, better than the Original. If the Author and Translator have done what may meet your Lordship’s Approbation, I’m confident they will both conclude they
they have both bestow'd their Pains very agreeably, since by that they must be sure of a certain Fame from their Performance.

This Edition falling to my Province, I thought I cou'd do no greater Honour to both, than to shelter them under so Glorious and Awful a Patronage: To which, my LORD, if I durst, I wou'd fly my self from those Misfortunes that have too lately oppress'd me. And here, my LORD, I feel the most severe Influence of my Stars, that deny me Merit enough to hope it: But as Heaven looks with an equal Eye of Compassion on all that want its Protection, so I hope so very fair a Copy of that great Original, will pardon me, when I presume to offer both my self and this Book to your Lordship, and to subscribe my self, my LORD,

Your LORDSHIP's most obedient
and most humble Servant,

S A M. B R I S C O E.

[Place this Epistle Dedicatory next after the Title of the History of the Oracles.]
THE

PREFACE

TO THE

History of Oracles.

NOT long since there fell into my Hands a small Book written in Latin, de Oraculis Ethnicorum, or of the Heathen Oracles, composed by Mr. Van-Dale, Doctor of Physick, and printed in Holland, in which I found that the Author has strenuously refuted the commonly received Opinion, That the ancient Oracles were delivered by Demons, and that they ceased wholly at the coming of Jesus Christ. The whole Work appeared to me to be full of Knowledge in Antiquity and profound Learning: Which gave me a great Curiosity to Translate it, that the Ladies and those Gentlemen, who do not much care to read Latin, might not be deprived of so agreeable and useful a Discourse. But I
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reflected, that a Translation of this Book (sho' excellents in its Original) would not be so good, if too closely turned into French: For Mr. Van-Dale wrote only for the Learn- ed, and had reason to neglect those Orna- ments and Softnesses which They do not e- steem; he cites a great number of Passages very faithfully, and his Versions are wonder- ful exaite when he Translates from the Greek; he enters also into a Discussion of many Points of Criticism, which, tho' they are not always necessary, yet they are always curious; and this he does, to gratifie the Learned, who care little for flourishing Reflections, Discourses of Morality, or pleasant Wit.

Besides, Mr. Van-Dale makes no difficulty very often to interrupt the Thread of his Dis- course, and to introduce other things which present themselves: And from one Digressi- on he sometimes pass to another, and so per- haps to a third. And herein he does not a- miss, since those for whom he writes, are fit- ted for the Fatigue of Reading, and this learned Disorder does not at all embarass or perplex them. But those, for whom I design this Translation, would have been very ill ac- commodated, if I had taken this Method: The dies, and the major part of the Men of this Country, are indeed more pleased with the Graces and Turns of Expression and Thought than
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than with the most exact Enquiries and profoundest Arguments: And being very fond of Ease, they desire to read Books written in a facile Method, that they may be the less obliged to a troublesome Attention. For this Reason, I laid by the thoughts of Translating, and thought it would be better, preserving the Foundation and principal Matter of the Work, to give it altogether another Form. And I confess, that no Man can extend this Liberty farther than I have done; for I have changed the whole Disposition of the Book, and have retrenched whatever appeared to me, either of too little Profit in itself, or of too little Pleasure to make amends for that little Profit. I have not only added all the Ornaments I could think of, but many things which prove or clear up what is in question upon the same Subject, and the same Passages, which Mr. Van-Dale furnished me withal. I argue sometimes in a manner contrary to his, and I have not been scrupulous to insert many Reasons wholly my own: In fine, I have new cast and modelled the whole Work, and have put it into the same Order as I should have done at first (to have pleased my particular View) had I had so much Knowledge as Mr. Van-Dale; but, since I am far from it, I have borrowed his Learning, and ventured to make use of my own Wit and Fancy.
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Fancy, (such as it is,) to adorn it. Nor should I have fail'd to have pursued his Method, had I had to do with the same Persons as he bad. And if it shall happen that this comes to his Knowledge, I beseech him to pardon the Liberty I have taken, since it will serve to shew the Excellency of his Book: For certainly what belongs to him, will still appear extremely fine, though it have passed through my Hands.

I have lately learned two things, which have Relation to this Book: The first out of the Treats called * Nouvelles, &c. or, News from the Commonwealth of Letters, which is, that Mr. Mæbius, Chief of the Professors of Divinity at Leipsick, has undertaken to confute Mr. Van-Dale. He acknowledges indeed, that Oracles did not cease at the Coming of Jesus Christ, (which will be indisputable when we shall have examined that Question;) but he will by no means yield, that Demons were not the Authors of Oracles. So that he himself makes a very considerable Invasion on the common Opinion, in allowing Oracles to extend themselves beyond the time of the Coming of Christ; and it will be a great Argument that they were not delivered by Demons, but by the Cheats of the Priests, if the Son of God did not silence them. *Tis cen-
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certain, that according to the usual Acceptation of these two Notions, what destroys the one extremely shakes the other, or rather quite ruins it: And this perhaps, after the reading of this Book, will be readily acknowledged to be so.

But what is more remarkable, is, that I found in the same Book, that one of Mr. Mabius's strongest Reasons against Mr. Van-Dale, was, that God forbade the Israelites to consult Wizards and the Spirits of Python, whence he concludes that Python, that is to say the Dæmons, managed the Oracles, and that it was by their Aid that the Ghost of Samuel was made to appear. Mr. Van-Dale may answer what he pleases, but for my part, I declare, that under the Name of Oracles, I do not pretend to comprehend Magick: In which it is not to be disputed but that Dæmons are concerned; nor is it comprehended in what we commonly understand by the word [Oracle] not even according to the Sense of the ancient Heathens, who on one side regarded Oracles with Respect, as a part of their Religion, and on the other Hand had a Horror for Magick, as well as we. To go and consult a Necromancer, or some Witch of Thebaly, like Erioto in Lucan, was not called, going to an Oracle; and if we mark it, this Distinction is true, even accor-
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according to the common Opinion, which affirms that Oracles ceased at the Coming of Christ, and yet no Man can pretend that Magick then ceased. So that the Objection of Mr. Mæbius makes nothing against me, if he take the word [Oracle] in its ordinary and natural Signification, as well ancient as modern.

The second thing I have to speak of is, that I am advertised that the reverend Father Thomasin, a Priest of the Oratory, famous for so many excellent Books, wherein he has joyned solid Piety to profound Learning, has taken from this Book the Honour of first broaching this Paradox, by treating Oracles as meer Knavery (in his Book called, The Method of Study, and of Teaching the Poets to Christian Children.) I confess I was a little troubled at this, but I pacified myself with reading the twenty first Chapter of the eleventh Book of this Method, where I found nothing relating to my Opinion, save only that in the nineteenth Article, there are a very few words to the following Sense: The true Reason (says he) why silence was imposed on Oracles, was, because by the Invocation of the Divine Word, truth has enlightened the World, and spread abroad abundance of Light far different from what was before, by which Men are emancipated.
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Tened from the Illusions of Augurs and Astrologers, the Observation of the Entrails of Beasts, and the greatest part of Oracles: Which were indeed but Impostures, whereby Men deceived one another with obscure Words that bore a double Sense: In fine, if there were Oracles, in which the Devil spoke, the coming of the Incarnate Truth condemned the Father of Lies to an eternal Silence. 'Tis however very certain that Demons were consulted, whenever Men had recourse to Inchantments and Magick, as Lucan reports of Pompey the Younger, and as the Scripture assures us concerning Saul. I agree that in such a great Treatise, which mentions Oracles but by the by (and that without any Design of searching into the depth of the Matter) it is enough to attribute the most part of Oracles to the Contrivances and Deceits of Men, and to make a Question whether there were any of them at all, in which Demons were concerned, and to allow the Demons no further Imploy-ment than comes within the compass of Incantations and Magick; and, in fine, to prove that Oracles ceas'd, not because the Son of God imposed Silence on 'em, all of a sudden, but because the most enlightened Wits were disabused by the Publication of the Gospel: Which still supposes that those Human Arti-

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The facts could not be detected in a little time. However in my Opinion a Question decided in so few words ought to be treated of anew, and that in all its natural Extent, without any Man's being offended by the Repetition; for 'tis putting in Great, what the World has hitherto seen but only in Little; and so in little, that its Objects are scarce perceptible.

I know not whether it be permitted me to enlarge my Preface, by making a short Observation upon the Stile I shall use, which is familiar, and after the manner of Conversing: And I imagine that I entertain my Reader so much the more pleasingly, because I must, as it were, dispute with him: And the Matter which I have in Hand, being often capable enough of being turned into Ridicule, engaged me in a Manner of Writing far different from that of Sublime; since I am of Opinion that none ought to write loftily, but he that writes in Defence of himself, it is so little natural. I confess, that the low Stile is yet something worse, but there is a Medium of a very great Latitude; yet 'tis mighty hard to take that Pitch which is necessary, and to keep steady to it.

THE
MY Design is not to give you directly an History of Oracles; I only intend to argue against that common Opinion which attributes 'em to Demons, and will have 'em to cease at the coming of Jesus Christ. In doing this 'tis necessary that I run through the whole History of Oracles, that I unfold their Originals, their Progress, the different Manners in which they were deliver'd; and lastly, their Decay, with the same Exactness as if I were in these Matters pursuing the Natural and Historical Order.

It is not at all surprizing, that Philosophers shou'd have so much trouble in finding out the Secrets of Nature, her Principles being so hidden that 'tis rashness in Men to think to discover 'em. But when we have no more to do, but to enquire whether the Oracles were a Trick
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Trick and Artifice of the Heathen Priests, or not, and at what time they ceas'd, Where lies the Difficulty? Cannot we that are imposed on every Day, imagine how far other Men may have been Deceivers, or deceived? But especially when the whole matter turns upon the time when Oracles ceased, Where can the Difficulty be? There are many Books that treat of Oracles; let us see therefore in what time, or in what Age the last Oracles, of which we have any knowledge, were deliver'd.

Men are not willing to suffer the Decision of things to be too easy, and therefore they mingle their own Prejudices with Truths, and so create greater Perplexities than are naturally found therein; and those Scruples, which our selves frame, give us the most pain to untangle. And in my Opinion this Business of Oracles hath no considerable Difficulty in it, but what we our selves have raised. It is in its own Nature, a matter of Religion amongst the Pagans, and become so without any Necessity amongst Christians, and on both sides it is loaded with Prejudices which obscure the clearest Truths.

I confess that Prejudices are not in themselves common to a true as well as a false Religion; for they reign chiefly in the false, which is only the Contrivance of Humane Wit; but in the true (which is the Production of God alone) there would none be ever found, if Humane Wit cou'd be prevented from intermedling and mixing something of its own with it; for all its new Inventions are but Prejudices without ground, and it is not able to add any thing
thing real or solid to the great Work of God. Nevertheless, these Prejudices that are in the true Religion, are, as I may say, so closely interwoven with it, that they have drawn that Respect to themselves which is only due to the true Religion; and we dare not find fault with the One, for fear of attacking at the same time something that is holy in the Other. I do not reproach this Excess of Religion in those that are capable of discerning, but rather praise it; yet whatever Commendations they may deserve, we cannot but confess, that a just Medium is much the safest Course; and that it is more reasonable to remove Error from Truth, than to venerate Error because it is mix'd with Truth. Christianity has been always able to stand of its self without false Proofs; but it is at present rendred more so than ever, by the Pains the great Men of this Age have taken to establish it on true Foundations with greater Power and Force than ever the Ancients did; and we ought to be fill'd with so just Confidence of our Religion, as to reject all false Advantages, tho' they may be useful to a weaker Party. Having laid this Foundation, I advance boldly to prove, That Oracles, of what nature soever, were not deliver'd by Demons, and that they did not ceafe at the coming of Jesus Christ. Each of which Points deserves a particular Discourse.
The First Discourse,

That Oracles were not given by Daemons.

It is certain, that there are Daemons, evil Genii, and Spirits condemn'd to eternal Punishment. Religion teaches us that; and if so, then our Reason must tell us, that these Daemons might have animated Statues, and delivered Oracles, if God had permitted them so to do. We are therefore only to inquire whether they had such Permission or not.

'Tis only then a Matter of Fact which is in dispute; and this Matter of Fact depending wholly on the Will of God, it is certain, that it would have been revealed to us, if the knowledge thereof were necessary. But the Holy Scriptures do not teach us any where, that Oracles were deliver'd by Daemons; and therefore we are at liberty to chuse which side we will take in this matter; for it is of the number of those things that the Divine Wisdom has thought fit to leave to our own Decision.

Now it is agreed on by the whole World, that there was something supernatural in Oracles;
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Oracles; the reason of which is easily found, as to what regards the present Age: For since it was believ'd in the first Ages of Christianity, that Oracles were deliver'd by Demons, this seems a sufficient cause for us to believe it now; for whatever was the Opinion of the Ancients, good or bad, it was always favourably received; and what they themselves cou'd not prove by sufficient Reasons, is in our Days prov'd by their Authority alone. If they foresaw this, they did very well not to give themselves the trouble of reasoning too nicely. But let us inquire after the Reasons which obliged the Primitive Christians to believe, that Oracles had something supernatural in 'em; and we shall afterwards try whether they were found and solid, or not.

CHAP.
CHAP. I.

The first Reason why the Primitive Christians believed that Oracles were delivered by Demons; and the surprising Histories that were publish'd concerning Oracles and Genii.

Antiquity is full of abundance of wonderful Histories and Oracles, which, as it is believ'd, must needs be attributed to Spirits: I will relate some few Examples, which shall serve for a Taste of what the rest were:

All the World knows what happen'd to the Pilot Thomas: His Ship being one Evening near certain Islands in the Aegean Sea, the Winds were hush'd on a sudden, and the Waves cease'd their motion; all the Passengers were awake, and the greatest part of 'em passing their time in drinking one with another, when on a sudden they heard a Voice, which came from the Islands, and call'd aloud, Thomas. Thomas suffer'd himself to be call'd thrice before he return'd an Answer, and then the Voice commanded him, that when he did arrive at a certain place, he should cry out, That the great Pan was dead. There was not a Man in the Ship who was not seiz'd with Fear and Dread at these Words; and they all consulted whether Thomas ought obey the Voice or
or not; but Thamus resolv'd that if when they were arrived at the appointed place, there were Wind enough to Sail onwards, he would pass by without saying any thing; but if a Calm happen'd to keep him there, he then would acquit himself of the Order he had receiv'd. And so finding himself to be surpriz'd with a Calm in that very place, he cry'd out with all his force, That the Great Pan was dead.

Scarce had he given over speaking, but they heard from every side Groans and Complaints as of a great Multitude surpriz'd and afflicted at this News. All those who were in the Ship were Witnesses of this Accident; the Fame of which spread it self in a little time, as far as Rome; and the Emperor Tiberius having a desire to see Thamus himself, assembled a great number of Pagan Priests to know of them who this great Pan was, and it was concluded, that he was the Son of Mercury and Penelope. Thus in Plutarch's Dialogues (where he treats of the Cessation of Oracles) Cleombron tells this Story, and says he had it of Epictetus his Grammar-master, who was in the Ship with Thamus when this Wonder happen'd.

Thulis was a King of Egypt, whose Empire extended it self as far as the Ocean: It is he who (as they said) gave the Name of Thule to the Isle now called Iceland. His Empire reaching thither was of a large Extent, and the King puff'd up with Pride at his Success and Prosperity went to the Oracle of Serapis, and thus he Spake to it: Thou that art the God of Fire, and who governest the...
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Course of the Heavens, tell me the Truth: Was there ever, or will there ever be one so Puisissant as myself?

The Oracle answer'd him thus:

First God, then the Word and Spirit, all—uniting in one, whose Power can never end. Go hence immediately, O Mortal, whose Life is always uncertain. And Thulus at his going thence had his Throat cut.

Eusebius has collected from the Writings of Porphyry the following Oracles:

1. Groan, ye Tripodes, Apollo leaves you; he is forced to leave you by a Celestial Light. Jupiter has been, is, and ever will be: Oh, great Jupiter! Alas! my famous Oracles are no more.

2. The Voice can return no more to the Priest; she is condemned to Silence. Make such Sacrifices to Apollo, as are worthy of a God.

3. Unhappy Priest, (said Apollo to one of his Priests) interrogate me no more concerning the Holy Father, his only Son, nor the Spirit, which is the Soul of all things: It is this Spirit that chases me for ever from these Abodes.

Augustus, now grown old, and designing to choose a Successor, went to consult the Oracle of Delphi. The Oracle returned no Answer, although Augustus spared no Sacrifice; but in the end he drew from it this following:

The Hebrew Infant, to whom all the Gods pay Obedience, chases me hence and sends me into Hell. Therefore quit this Temple, without speaking any more.
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It is easy to see, that upon the Credit of such like Histories, they ground their Opinion, who say, that Damons employed themselves in pronouncing Oracles. This great Pan (who died in the Reign of Tiberius, as well as Jesus Christ) is the Master and Prince of the Damons, whose Empire was ruined by the Death of a God so faying to the Universe: Or, if this Explanation do not please you, (for I hope we may without Impiety give different Solutions of the same thing, altho' it be of a religious Concern) this great Pan was Jesus Christ himself: Whose Death caused so general a Grief and Conferrnation among the Damons, who from that time could no more exercise their Tyranny over Mankind: Thus a way has been found out to give a double Account who this great Pan was.

Could the Oracle delivered to King Thulus (an Oracle so positive concerning the Holy Trinity) be a Humane Fiction? How could the Priest of Serapis have divined so great Mystery, unknown then to all the World, and even to the Jews themselves?

If these Oracles were delivered by Priests, who were Impostors, what could oblige them to discredit themselves, and publish the Cessation of their own gainful Oracles? Is it not visible, that God forced Damons to bear Witness to the Truth? Besides, why did the Oracles cease, if they were only deliver'd by Priests?
The second Reason why the Primitive Christians believed that Oracles were supernatural; and the Agreement of this Opinion with the System of Christianity.

That there are Damons being once allowed by Christianity, it was natural and easy enough to attribute to them the Ability of performing any thing that is Great and Wonderful, and not to refuse them the Power of delivering Oracles, and effecting any other Pagan Miracles, which seemed to have need of their Assistance. And thus the Ancients saved themselves the trouble of enquiring into a strict Enquiry about Matters which would be tedious and difficult: For all that was surprizing and extraordinary, was without any more ado ascribed to these Damons: And this alone they thought a sufficient Confirmation of their Existence, and of the Religion it self that warranted it.

Moreover, It is certain, that about the time of the Birth of Jesus Christ, there is often mention made of the Cessation of Oracles even in Prophane Authors. Now, why this time rather than any other, was destined for the Cessation of them is very easily made out, according to the System of the Christian Religion. God had chosen his People out of the Jewish Nation, and left the Empire of the rest of the World to Damons till the coming of his Son; but
but then, he deprived them of that Power, which before he permitted them to have: His Will then was, that all should submit themselves to Jesus Christ; and that nothing should hinder the Establishment of his Kingdom over all the World. There is such a sort of Happiness in this Thought, that I do not wonder it has made so great a Progress. This is one of those Things to the Truth of which we so early accord, and which persuaded us, because we are willing to believe.

**CHAP. III.**

The third Reason of the Primitive Christians, taken from the Agreement of their Opinion with the Philosophy of Plato.

**Ne**ver any Philosophy was so A-la-mode, as that of Plato during the first Ages of the Church: The Pagans interested themselves amongst all the different Sects of Philosophers, but the Conformity which Plato's was found to have with Religion, made almost all the knowing Christians of that Sect. Thence came the mighty Esteem they had of Plato; they looked upon him as a sort of Prophet who had fore-told many important Points of Christianity, especially that of the Holy Trinity; (which we cannot deny to be clearly enough contained in his Writings:) Nay, they went so far as to take his Works for Comments on the Scrip-
Scripture; and to conceive the Nature of the Word, as he conceived it. He represented God so elevated above his Creatures, that he did not believe that they were immediately made by his Hands; and therefore he put between them and him this Word, as a degree by which the Actions of God might pass down to them: The Christians had the like Idea of Jesus Christ: And this may perhaps be the Reason why no Heresie has been more generally received and maintained with greater Heat than Arianism.

This Platonism then (which seems to Honour the Christian Religion by countenancing it) was very full of Notions about Damons: And thence they easily pass’d into that Opinion which the old Christians had of Oracles.

Plato said that Damons were of a middle Nature, between God and Man; that they were the aerial Genii appointed to hold Commerce, between God and us; that altho’ they were near us, yet we cou’d not see them; that they penetrated into all our Thoughts; that they had a Love for the Good, and a Hatred for the Bad; and that it was for their Honour that such variety of Sacrifices, and so many different Ceremonies were appointed: But it does not at all appear, that Plato acknowledg’d any evil Damons, to which might be attributed the management of the Illusions of Oracles. Plutarch, notwithstanding, assures us, that Plato was not ignorant of them; and amongst the Platonical Philosophers, the thing is out of doubt. * Eusebius in his Evangelical Preparations, recites
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cites a great number of Passages out of Por-
phyrius, where the Pagan Philosopher assures
us, that evil Demons are the Authors of En-
chantments, Philtres and Witch-crafts; that
they cheat our Eyes with Spectres, Fantoms
and Apparitions; that Lying is essential to their
Nature; that they raise in us the greatest part
of our Passions; and that they have an Am-
bition to pass with us for Gods; that their
aerial and spiritual Bodies are nourished with
Suffumigations, and with the Blood and Fat of
Sacrifices; and that 'tis only these that imploy
themselves in giving Oracles, and to whom this
Task so full of Fraud is assign'd: In short, at
the Head of this Troop of evil Demons he pla-
ces Hecate and Serapis.

Jamblichus, another Platonist, has
said as much. And the greatest part
of these things being true, the Chi-
ristians received them all with Joy, and have
added to them besides a little of their own:
As for example, That the Demons stole from
the Writings of the Prophets some Knowledge
of things to come; and so got Honour by it
in their Oracles.

This System of the ancient Christians had
this Advantage, that it discovered to the Pa-
gans by their own Principles, the Original of
their false Worship, and the Source of those
Errors which they always embraced. They
were persuaded that there was something su-
pernatural in their Oracles; and the Christians,
who were always disputing against them, did
not desire to confute this Opinion. Thus by
Demons (which both Parties believed to be
concerned in the Oracles,) they explicated all that was supernatural in them. They acknowledged indeed that this sort of ordinary Miracles were wrought in the Pagan Religion; but then they ruined this Advantage again, by imputing them to such Authors as evil Spirits. And this way of convincing, was more short and easie, than to contradict the Miracle itself, by a long Train of Enquiries and Arguments. Thus I have given you the manner how that Opinion which the first Ages of the Church had of the Pagan Oracles, was grounded; I might to the three Reasons, which I have already brought, add a fourth of no less Authority perhaps than those; that is, That in the Supposition of Oracles being given by Demons, there is something miraculous: And if we consider the Humour of Mankind a little, we shall find how much we are taken with any thing that is miraculous. But I do not intend to enlarge myself on this Reflection; for those that think upon it, will easily believe me, and those that do not, will perhaps give it no Credit, notwithstanding all my Arguments.

Let us now examine the several Reasons which Men have had to believe Oracles to be Supernatural.
CHAP. IV.

That the surprizing Histories of Oracles ought to be suspected.

It is very difficult to give an Account of those Stories and Oracles which we have mentioned, without having Recourse to Demons. But the Question is, Whether they be true? Let us be assured of the Matter of Fact, before we trouble ourselves with enquiring into the Cause. It is true, that this Method is too slow and dull for the greatest part of Mankind, who run naturally to the Cause, and pass over the Truth of the Matter of Fact; but for my part, I will not be so ridiculous as to find out a Cause for what is not.

This kind of Misfortune happened so pleasantly at the end of the last Age, to some learned Germans, that I cannot forbear speaking of it: 'In the Year 1593, there was a Report, that the Teeth of a Child of Silesia of seven Years old, dropp'd out, and that one of Gold came in the Place of one of his great Teeth. Horstius, a Physician in the University of Heidelberg, wrote, in the Year 1595, the History of this Tooth, and pretends that it was partly natural, and partly miraculous, and that it was sent from God to this Infant, to comfort the Christians who were then afflicted by the Turks.

Now fannie to your self what a Consolation this was, and what this Tooth could signify, either
either to the Christians or the Turks. In the same year (that this Tooth might not want for Historians) one Rolandus wrote a Book of it; Two Years after, Ingolfeterus, another learned Man, wrote against the Opinion of Rolandus concerning this Golden Tooth; and Rolandus presently makes a learned Reply. Another great Man, named Libavius, collected all that had been said of this Tooth, to which he added his own Opinion. In fine their wanted nothing to so many famous Works, but only the Truth of its being a Golden Tooth. For when a Gold-smith had examined it, he found, that it was only a thin Plate of Gold fix'd to the Tooth with a great deal of Art. Thus they first went about to compile Books, and afterwards they consulted the Gold-smith.

Nothing is more natural than to do the same thing in all other cases. And I am not so convinc'd of our Ignorance by the things that are, and of which the Reasons are unknown, as by those which are not, and for which we yet find out Reasons. That is to say, as we want those Principles that lead us to Truth, so we have those which agree exceeding well with Error and Falsehood.

Some learned Physicians have found out the reason why places under Ground are hot in the Winter and cool in the Summer; and greater Physicians have since discover'd that they are not so.

Historical Enquiries are much more liable to this Error: For when we argue from what is said in History, what Assurances have we that these Historians have never been byass'd, nor
nor credulous, nor misinform'd, nor negligent? 'Tis necessary therefore that we should look out for one, that has been an Eye-witness of all those things of which he writes, unconcern'd by Interest, and diligent: But especially when Men write of such Matters of Fact, as have a relation to Religion, it is very hard not to favour (according to the Party of which they are) a false Religion with those Advantages that are not due to it; or not to give a true one those false Assurances of which it has no need: And yet we may be assured that we can never add more Truth to what is true already, nor make that true which is false.

Some Christians in the first Age, for want of having been convinced of this Maxim, have suffer'd themselves, in favour of Christianity, to introduce Suppositions bold enough, which the founder part of Christians have been fain afterwards to disown. This inconsiderate Zeal has produc'd a great number of Apocryphal Books, to which were given the Names of Pagan or Jewish Authors; for the Church, having to do with these two sorts of Enemies, what was more advantageous to her than to fight 'em with their own Weapons, by producing Books, which, tho' made as was pretended, by their own Party, were written nevertheless very much in favour of Christianity? But whilst they strainght the Point too far, to draw from those Counterfeit Works some very great Benefit to their Religion, they gained none at all; for the Clearness of the manner in which they were written, betray'd them; and our Mysteries are therein so plainly unfold-
that the Prophets of the Old and New Testament understood nothing in comparison of those Jewish and Pagan Authors. And which way soever Men turn themselves to save the Reputation of those Books, they will find in their too great Clearness a Difficulty not to be surmounted. If some Christians fathered spurious Books on Pagans and Jews, Heretics found the way of doing the like on the Orthodox. There was nothing to be met with but false Gospels, false Epistles of the Apostles, and false Histories of their Lives; and nothing but an Effect of the Divine Providence could have separated the Truth from so many Apocryphal Works, as confounded it.

Some great Men of the Church have sometimes been deceived either by the spurious Works of Heretics farthered upon the Orthodox, or by what the Christians father upon the Jews; but oftenest by the latter. For they seldom examine strictly enough that which seems favourable to Religion; the Heat with which they contest for so good a Cause, not giving them the leisure to make a good Choice of their Weapons. This is the reason that they have hapned sometimes to make use of the Books of the Sibyls, or of those of Hermes Trismegistus, King of Egypt.

We do not intend by this to weaken the Authority, or to lessen the Merit of those great Men. For after we shall have examin'd all the Errors, (into which perhaps they have fallen on some certain Subjects,) there will yet remain abundance of solid Reasonings, and very curious Discoveries, which are worthy of our highest
highest Admiration. And if, with the true 
Proofs of our Religion, they have left us others 
which may be suspected, it is our part to re-
ceive that only which is legitimate; and to 
pardon their Zeal, who have furnished us with 
more Proofs than there was any necessity for.

I am not at all surpriz'd that this same Zeal 
has convinced 'em of the truth of I know not 
how many Oracles, advantageous to their Re-
ligion, which passed for currant in the first A-
ges of the Church. The Authors of the Books 
of the Sibyls, and those of Hermes Trismegistus, 
were also probably the Authors of these Or-
acles; at least it was more easy to feign them, 
than to counterfeit intire Volumes. The Hi-
story of Thamus is originally Heathen, and yet 
Eusebius and other great Authors have given it 
the Reputation of being believ'd. It is imme-
diately followed in Plutarch with a Relation so 
rudicrous, that it will be sufficient wholly to 
discredit the other: For Demetrius says there, 
that the most part of the Islands near England 
are desert, and consecrated to Demons and He-
roes; and that he, being sent by the Emperor 
to discover these Islands, chanced to land upon 
one of those that were peopled, and that, a 
little time after his arrival, there happen'd a 
Tempest and terrible Claps of Thunder and 
Lightning, which made the People of the 
Country conclude that some one of their Prin-
cipal Demons was dead; because their Deaths 
were always attended with something strange 
and horrible. To this Demetrius adds, That 
one of those Islands was the Prison of Saturn, 
who was kept there by Briareus, and was buri-

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ed in a profound Sleep (which methinks should render the Custody of the Giant very needless) in compass'd with an infinite number of Demons lying at his feet as Slaves.

Has not Demetrius made a very curious Relation of this Voyage? And is it not pleasant to see such a Philosopher as Plutarch coldly relate to us such wonderful things? It is not without reason that Herodotus is esteemed the Father of History; and all the Greek Writers of that kind are on that account his Off-spring, and partake of his Genius. They have something of Truth, but more of wonderful and amusing Stories. But let it be how it will, it were sufficient almost to refute the History of Thamus (tho' it had no other Defect) to have been found in the same Treatise with the Demons of Demetrius.

But besides this, it cannot receive a reasonable Interpretation. For if the great God Pan were a Damon, could not the Demons have sent one another an Account of one of their Deaths, without employing Thamus to that end? Have they no other way of informing one another of News? And, on the other side, can they be so imprudent as to discover to Men their Misfortunes, and the Weakness of their Natures? God compell'd 'em, perhaps, you will say. Then God had some design in doing so: But let us see what follow'd thereupon; there was no Person that was converted from Paganism by having heard of the Death of the great God Pan. It was declared that he was the Son of Mercury and Penelope, and that it was not he that was acknowledg'd in Arcadia for Suprem God
God of all (as his Name imports) and therefore tho' the Voice had named him the Great Pan, yet he was understood to be but the Little Pan, whose Death was of no great Consequence, and there did not appear any considerable Regret for it.

If this great Pan were Jesus Christ, the Demons would not have told to Men News of a Death so much to their Advantage, unless God had compell'd them to it. But what's the Effect of all this? Did any one understand the Name of Pan, in its true Sense? Plutarch liv'd in the second Age of the Church, and yet no Person then knew that Pan was Jesus Christ, who died in Judea.

The History of Thulis is related by Suidas (an Author who heaps up a great many things, perhaps ill enough chosen) his Oracle of Serapis is reproach'd with the same Fault, as the Books of the Sibyls; that is, of being too clear concerning our Mysteries. And farther, we are certain that this Thulis, King of Egypt was not one of the Ptolemies; and what then will become of the whole Oracle, if Serapis were a God first brought into Egypt by a Ptolemy, who sent for him out of Pontus, as many learned Men pretend from very strange Probabilities? At least it is certain that Herodotus, who has written so plentifully about old Egypt, does not mention Serapis, and that Tacitus recounts at length how, and why one of the Ptolemies brought from Pontus the God Serapis, that was then known no where else.

The Oracle, said to be given to Augustus con-cerning
cerning the Hebrew Child, is by no means to be receiv'd. Cedrenus cites Eusebius for it; but at this day there is no such thing to be found there. It is not impossible that Cedrenus should make a false Citation, or should cite some Work not rightly attributed to Eusebius: He has thought fit to relate, upon the Credit of certain counterfeit Histories of St. Peter, which pass'd for currant in his time, That Simon the Magician had at his Door a great Dog, which devour'd all those that his Master would not have enter; and that St. Peter coming thither to speak with Simon, commanded the Dog to go and tell his Master in Humane Language, That Peter, the Servant of God, would speak with him: The Dog went and performed that Command, to the great Amazement of such as were then with Simon. But Simon, to shew that he could do as much as St. Peter, bid the Dog go and tell him, That he might enter: which the Dog immediately did. Hence you may see what it is that the Greeks call Writing of History. Cedrenus lived in an ignorant Age, when the Liberty of writing Fables was joyned with the general Inclination of the Greeks towards 'em.

But tho' Eusebius, in some Work of his, which has not come down to us, had effectually spoke of the Oracle of Augustus, yet we find Eusebius himself is sometimes deceived; of which there are good Proofs. The first Defenders of Christianity, Justin, Tertullian, Theophilus, Tatian, would they have said nothing of an Oracle so much in Favour of their Religion?
gion? Had they so little Zeal as to
neglect a thing of such Advantage?
but even * those that gave us this O-
ra"e", spoil it by adding, That Augustus in his
Return to Rome, built in the Capitol an Altar
with this Inscription, This is the Altar of the on-
ly Son (or Eldest Son) of God. Where had he
the Idea of this only Son of God, of which the
Oracle makes no mention? In short, that which
is most observable, is, that Augustus after the
Voyage he made into Greece, nineteen Years
before the Birth of Jesus Christ, never returned
to Rome; but allowing that he did, he was
not then in an Humour to erect Altars to any
God but himself: For he suffered not only the * Asian Maids to raise
Altars to him, and celebrate Holy
Games in his Honour; but also at Rome the con-
secrated one to Fortune returning, Fortuna reduci;
that was to say, to himself, and they were to
keep the Day of his happy Return as a Festival.
The Oracles which Eusebius relates out of Por-
phyrius, appear harder to make out than all the
rest; for Eusebius would not have charged Por-
phyrius with Oracles of which he made no menti-
on, and Porphyrius, who was so addicted to Paga-
nism, would not have cited false Oracles (con-
cerning the Cessation of Oracles themselves) to
the Advantage of the Christian Religion: For
in this Case, it seems, that the Testimony of an
Enemy has a great deal of Credit and Force.

But on the other side, Porphyrius was not so
unskilful a Man, as to furnish the Christians
with Weapons against Paganism, without be-
ing necessarily engaged to it by the consequence

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of some Reasons, which does not in this matter appear to be his Case. If these Oracles had been alleged by the Christians, and Porphyrius owning that they were effectually given, had denied the Consequences drawn from them, it is certain that they would have then been much to be relied on.

But it is out of Porphyrius himself that the Christians (as it appears by the Example of Eusebius) pretend to fetch these Oracles; it seems, that Porphyrius takes Pleasure to ruine his own Religion, and to establish another. The Truth is, this is suspicious of it self, and yet it becomes more so, by his pushing the thing so far; for they tell us from him of I know not how many Oracles most clear and most positive, concerning the Person of Jesus Christ, concerning his Resurrection and Ascension. In fine, the most resolute, and knowing amongst the Pagans hath loaded us with Proofs of Christianity; we may well suspect so great a Piece of Generosity.

Eusebius believed it a very great Advantage to be able to place Porphyrius at the Head of a Multitude of Oracles so favourable to Religion; and he gives them us stripp'd of whatever accompanies them, in the Writings of Porphyrius. How do we know, but that he did refute them? According to the Interest of his Cause, he ought to have done it; and if he did not do it, certainly he had some hidden Intention.

It is to be suspected, that Porphyrius was wicked enough to frame false Oracles, and present them to Christians, with a design of making
king Sport with their Credulity, if they should receive them for true, and endeavour to strengthen their Religion by such like Props: And then he would have drawn thence such Consequences as would be of greater Importance than these Oracles, and with this Injustice have attacked the whole Religion. However, at the bottom this would have been but a frivolous Argument.

'Tis very certain, that this same Porphyrius (who furnisheth us with all these Oracles) held, (as we have seen) that they were delivered by lying Spirits; it may very well then be imagined, that he hath put into Oracles all the Mysteries of our Religion, endeavouring to destroy it by rendering it suspected of Forgery, as depending on the Testimony of false Witnesses: I know the Christians did not take it so; yet seeing they could never prove by any Argument, that the Demons were sometimes forced to speak the Truth, Porphyrius was always in a condition to make use of his Oracles again them. And therefore (if we take the Matter right) their better way had been to have denied, that there were ever any Oracles, as we do at this present. This appears to me to be a sufficient Reason, why Porphyrius was so prodigal of Oracles, that were so favourable to our Religion. But what would have been the Success of the great Debate between the Christians and Infidels, we can only conjecture; for all the written Pieces of their Disputes are not come to our Hands. Thus in examining things a little closer than ordinary, we find that the Oracles, which were reckoned such
such Wonders, never were at all; of which, I shall not need to give any more Instances, all the rest being of the same Nature.

CHAP. V.

That the common Opinion concerning Oracles does not agree so well as 'tis imagin'd with the Christian Religion.

The silence of the Scriptures concerning these evil Demons, (which are pretend-ed to be the Managers of Oracles) hath not only left us at liberty to believe nothing of 'em, but it obliges us to believe the contrary; for can it be possible that the Scriptures should not have instructed the Jews and Christians in a thing which it so extremely imported them to know, (and which they cou'd never have found out by their natural Reason) to the end that they might not be shaken in their own Religion, by seeing things so surprising in an-other. For I conceive that God spake not to Man, but to supply the weakness of his Understand-ing, which of it self was not sufficient to guide him; and that whatsoever he has not declar'd to him, is either of such a nature that he may learn it by himself, or else God does not think it necessary that he should know it. So if the Oracles had been deliver'd by evil Demons, God would have made it known to us, to have prevented us from believing that he himself deliver'd 'em, or that there was some-thing Divine in false Religions.
David reproached the Infidels with Gods that had Mouths and spake not, and wishes that their Adorers, for a Punishment, might become like those they ador'd; but if these Gods had not only the use of Speech, but also the Knowledge of Things to come, I see no reason David had thus to reproach the Infidels; nor ought they to have been angry for having been resembled to their Gods. When the Holy Fathers inveighed with so much reason against the Worship of Idols, they always argued from the Impotency of 'em; but if they had spoken, if they had predicted things to come, then they ought not to have treated them with such Contempt on the account of their Impotency, but should rather have disdained the People, and have confess'd the wondrous Power that was in 'em: In fine, could they be so mightily mistaken who ador'd what they believed was animated by a Divine Virtue, or at least a Vertue more than Humane? 'Tis true, you'll say, that these Demons were Enemies of God; but how cou'd the Heathens Divine that? Because Demons required Ceremonies that were barbarous and extravagant; the Pagans themselves believ'd 'em fantastical and cruel, but nevertheless they believ'd 'em more powerful than Men; nor did they know that the true God offer'd 'em his Protection against them. They did for the most part submit themselves to their Gods as to dreaded Enemies who were to be appeased at any Price; nor had this Submission and Fear been quite without Reason, if so be that in effect Demons did give some proof of their Power over Nature.
ture. In fine, Paganism (tho' a Worship abominable in the sight of God) would have been but an involuntary and excusable Error.

But you will say, if the crafty Priests made it their Business to impose upon the People, then Paganism was no more but a simple Error into which the Credulous fell, whilst their honest and downright Intention was to Honour a Superior Being.

But the Case is much otherwise; for it be-hoves Men to Precaution themselves against Errors, into which other Men may lead 'em; but there is no possibility of fore-arming themselves against those Errors into which they may be led by Genii or Damons, which are above themselves. The light of my Reason is sufficient to examine whether a Statue speaks or does not, but in the moment that it does speak, nothing can perfwade me against the Divinity which I attribute to it. In a word, God is oblig'd by the Laws of his Bounty to protect me from those Surprizes from which I cannot defend myself; but as for other things, it belongs to my Reason to do its Office.

We see also that when God permitted the Damons to work Prodigies, he at the same time confounded them by working Miracles far greater. Pharaoh might be deceived by the Magicians, but Moses was still more powerful than the Magicians of Pharaoh. The Damons never had more power, or did more surprizing things, than in the time of Jesus Christ and the Apostles. This hinders not, but that Paganism with Justice hath been always called the Worship of Damons. For in the first place, the
the Idea which is taken therein of the Divinity, does not at all agree with the true God, but with the Reprobate and eternally unhappy Genii.

Secondly, The Design of the Heathens was not so much to adore the first Being, which is the Source of all Good, but those ill Beings of whose Anger and Caprice they stood in fear. In fine, the Demons, (who have without Contradiction the power of tempting Men and laying Snares for 'em) countenanced as much as ever they could the gross Errors of the Pagans, and made 'em blind to Impostures, which were notoriously visible. From hence it is said that Paganism was not born up by the Miracles, but by the Artifices of Demons; which supposes that in whatever they did there was nothing of reality 'or truth, nor of such force as effectually to make a Statue speak.

Nevertheless, it may be that God has sometimes permitted the Demons to animate Idols; but if this ever happen'd, God had his peculiar Reasons for it, which are always worthy of profound Veneration; but, generally speaking, there has never been any such thing. God permitted the Devil to burn the Houses of Job, and lay his Pastures desolate; to cause all his Oxen and Sheep to die; to strike his Body with a thousand Wounds; but it must not therefore be said that the Devil is let loose on all those to whom such Misfortunes happen. When there is a Discourse about any Man's being sick, or ruin'd, we never think that the Devil is concern'd in it. The Case of Job is a particular Case; we argue independantly of it,
it, and our general Reasoning never excludes the Exceptions that the Almighty Power of God can make in all things.

'Tis apparent then that the common Opinion concerning Oracles, does not very well agree with the Bounty of God, and that it discharges Paganism of the greatest part of the Extravagances and Abominations which the Holy Fathers always found in it. The Pagans might have laid in their own Justification, That it was no Wonder, that they should obey those which animated Statues, and performed every Day a thousand extraordinary things; and therefore the Christians to take from them all Excuse, ought never to have yielded 'em this Point. If all the Pagan Religion were no other than the Cheats of Priests, Christians took advantage of the Excess of Ridiculousness into which the Pagans fell.

Besides, is there any great appearance that the Disputes between the Christians and Pagans was in that State, seeing Porphyrius confesses with so much Willingness, that the Oracles were delivered by evil Demons? Of these evil Demons he made a double use: He made use of 'em (as we have already seen) to render those Oracles unprofitable and disadvantageous to the Christian Religion, which the Christians thought were on their side; and besides he imputed all the Follies and Barbarities of an infinite number of Sacrifices, which without ceasing they reproach'd the Pagans withal, to these cunning and cruel Genii. We then attack Porphyrius even in his last Retrenchments, and assert the true Interest of Christianity, by under-
undertaking to prove that Damons were not the Authors of Oracles.

C H A P. VI.

That Demons are not sufficiently established by Platonism.

In the first Ages, Poetry and Philosophy were the same thing, and all Wisdom was contained in Verse. Nor was Poetry more credited by this Alliance, but Philosophy was less. Homer and Hesiod were the first Grecian Philosophers; and thence it is that all other Philosophers have had in very great Estimation whatever they said, and have never cited them but with great Honour.

Homer very often confounds together the Gods and Damons: But Hesiod distinguishes four Species or Kinds of reasonable Natures, viz. the Gods, Damons, the Demy-Gods, or Heroes, and Men. Nay, he goes farther yet, and notes the Duration of the Lives of Damons: For the Nymphs, of which he speaks in the place I am going to cite, are these Damons, and Plutarch understands them so.

A Crow, (says Hesiod) lives nine times as long as a Man, a Stag four times as long as a Crow, a Raven three times as long as a Stag, the Phoenix nine times as long as a Raven; and in fine, the Nymphs ten times as long as the Phoenix. One would take this Calculation for no other than a mere Poetick Fancy, unworthy the Reflections
ons of a Philosopher, or the Imitation of a Poet; for there is in it neither Agreeableness nor Truth. But Plutarch is not of this Opinion; for he finds, that supposing the Life of Man to be seventy Years, (which is his ordinary Duration,) the Demons then ought to live six hundred and eighty thousand, and four hundred Years: And not conceiving how any Experiment of this so long Life of the Demons can be made, he rather believes that Hesiod by the Age of Man, understands but one Year. The Interpretation is not very natural; but according to this Estimation, the Life of the Demons is not above nine thousand seven hundred and twenty Years, and then Plutarch had not much trouble to find out how Demons could live so long. And besides, he remarks in the number of nine thousand seven hundred and twenty Years, certain Pythagorean Perfections, which render it altogether worthy to design the Term of the Lives of Demons. Such as these are the boasted Reasonings of Antiquity.

From the Poems of Homer and Hesiod, the Demons passed into the Phylosophy of Plato, who can never be too much commended, since 'tis he, of all the Greeks, who has conceived the highest Idea of God; tho' even that plunged him in false Notions: For, because God is infinitely elevated above Men, he believed that there ought to be placed between him and us, a kind of middle Beings, which should cause a Communication of two Extremes so far distant, by the means of which, the Operations of the Deity might be brought down to us: God (says he) resembles a Triangle, which has
three Sides equal; the Demons are like a Triangle that has but two Sides equal, and Men are like a Triangle which has all three Sides unequal.

This Idea is well enough fancied, and there is nothing wanting but something of Solidity to support it.

But after all (may it be said) has not Plato reasoned justly? And do not we know for certain by the Holy Scriptures, that there are Genii, Ministers of the Will of God, and his Messengers to Men? Is it not wondrous that Plato should discover this; only by the Light of his Natural Reason?

I confess, that Plato has conjectured aright; nevertheless, I blame him for his Conjecture. Divine Revelation assures us of the Existence of Angels and Demons, but it is not within the Sphere of Humane Reason to assure us of it. He knows not what to make of the infinite Space which is between God and Man, and therefore he fills it with Genii and Demons. But with what shall that infinite Space be fill’d, which is between God and these Genii or Demons themselves? For the Distance between God and any Creature whatsoever, is infinite. And if the Actions and Will of God must traverse, as one may say, this infinite Vacuum to go to the Demons, they may as well reach even to Men, since they are farther off but by very few Degrees, which bear no Proportion to the first great Distance. When God treats with Men by the Ministry of Angels, ’tis not no be understood that Angels are necessary for this Communication (as Plato pretends;) God employs them for Reasons, into which Philoso-

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...phy can never penetrate, and which can never be perfectly known but by himself.

According to that Idea, which the Comparison of the Triangle gives us, we find that Plato framed this Notion of Demons, to the end we might mount from one Creature to another Creature more perfect, till at length we arriv'd at God himself. So that God would have but some degrees of Perfection more than the highest Creature; but it is visible, that as they are all infinitely Imperfect in respect of him, because they are all infinitely distant from him; so the Differences of Perfection, which are between the Creatures, vanish as soon as they are compared with God; for what elevates them one above another does not at all bear any Proportion to him.

And if we consult nothing but Human Reason, there is no need of Spirits to make the Actions of God communicable to Men, nor of placing between God and us any thing that approaches him, nearer than we do.

And perhaps Plato himself was not so sure of the Existence of his Demons, as the Platonists have since been. That which makes me suspect this, is, That he places Love in the number of the Demons, (for he often mixes Gallantry with Philosophy, and his Talent is not mean on Subjects of that Nature.) He says, That Love is the Son of the God of Riches, and the Goddess of Poverty: From his Father he holds, his Greatness of Courage, his Elevation of Thought, his Inclination to give, his Prodigality and his Confidence in his Strength, his good Opinion of his own Merit, and Desire to
to have always the Preference. But, on the other side, he holds from his Mother that Indigence, which makes him always asking, that Importunity with which he asks, that Timidity and Bashfulness, which hinders him often times from daring to ask, that Disposition which he has to Servitude, and that Fear of being despised, which he can never lose. This, in my Opinion, is one of the prettiest Fables that was ever made. It is pleasant to find Plato sometimes writing Amours as soft and agreeable as Anacreon could himself have done. This Description of the Pedegree of Love extremely well sets forth all the Fantaisticalness of his Nature: But we know not what to make of Demons, if Love must pass for one.

There is no appearance that Plato understood this in a Natural and Philosophical Sense, nor that he could say, Love was a Being out of us, or extrinseical, which inhabits the Air: Certainly, he means this only as a Gallantry, and then it must be permitted me to believe, that all his Demons are of the same kind with Love. And that, since he mingles Fables with his System, he cares not much, if the rest of his System pass for a Fable. Hence we have only answered the Reasons, that made Men believe Oracles, to have had something in them of Supernatural. Let us now begin more closely to attack this Opinion.
CHAP. VII.

That some grand Sects of the Pagan Philosophers, did not believe there was any thing Supernatural in Oracles.

If in the midst of Greece it self, where all places refounded with their Oracles, we had maintained, that they were but Impostures, no one would have been astonished with the Boldness of the Paradox; and there would have been no need of taking any Measures, how to vend the Opinion in secret. For Philosophers were divided about the Subject of Oracles; the Platonists and Stoicks were for them, but the Cynicks, Peripateticks and Epicureans declared highly against them. The Wonders of the Oracles were not so great, but that half the wise Men of Greece were still at liberty to believe nothing of them; and this, notwithstanding the common Prejudices or Bigotry of the Grecians: Which is a very remarkable thing.

* Lib. 4. of his Evang. Preparations.

* Eusebius tells us of six hundred Heathen Authors who have writ against the Oracles: But of all these, in my Opinion, Oenomaus, (of whom he makes mention, and of whom he has preserved some Fragments) is one, the Loss of whose Works are to be the most lamented. There is a great deal of Pleasure to be found in those Fragments of his that remain where Oenomaus, full of his Cynical Liberty, argues upon every Oracle against the God who delivered it, and draws up an Accusation against him.
him. See how he treats the God of Delphos, who in his Answer to Cresus had pronounced these Words:

Cresus, in passing the River Halis, shall destroy a great Empire.

Which fell out accordingly; for Cresus passing the River Halis attack'd Cyrus, who (as all the World knows) came thundring upon him, and divested him of his Kingdoms.

You boast, (says Oenomaus to Apollo) in another Oracle delivered to Cresus, that you know the Number of the Grains of the Sea-sand; and I suppose, you set a great Value upon your Self, because you saw from Delphos, the Tortoise that Cresus ordered to be boiled in Lydia, at that very instant; this is a precious Knowledge to be proud of! But when you were consulted concerning the Success of the War between Cresus and Cyrus, there you were at a Stand. If you can divine what shall happen in time to come, to what purpose do you make use of a manner speaking which cannot be understood? Do you not foresee your Self, that they will not be understood? If you do foresee it, you then take pleasure to make us your Sport; if you do not know it, let us inform you, that you ought to speak more clearly, and that you are not understood. I tell you also, if you have a mind to use an Equivo-ration, that the Greek words by which you express, That Cresus shall destroy a great Empire, are not well chosen, and that they can signify nothing else but a Victory of Cresus over Cyrus. If there be a necessity that things must happen, wherefore dost thou amuse us with thy Ambiguities? What dost thou do at Delphos, (unhappily employ'd as thou art) to sing us useless Prophecies? to what purpose do we

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make thee so many sacrifices? Whaterty possess
us?

But Oenomaus is yet more out of humour with the Oracle, which Apollo delivered to the Athenians. When Xerxes fell upon Greece with all the Forces of Asia, the Pythian Oracle gave some for answer,

"That Minerva, Protectress of Athens, endeavoured all manner of ways (but in vain) to appease the Anger of Jupiter; but nevertheless Jupiter, in favour of his Daughter, consented to suffer the Athenians to save themselves in Walls of Wood; and that Salamine shou'd see the Destruction of many Children dear to their Mothers; either when Ceres shou'd be scattered abroad, or when she should be gathered in.

Upon this Oenomaus wholly loses his Respect for the God of Delphos.

This Combat between the Father and the Daughter, says he, is very unhandsome for Gods. 'Tis very pretty there should be in Heaven such contrary Interests and Inclinations! Jupiter is angry with Athens, he brings down all the Forces of Asia against it; but if he could not have ruin'd it without 'em, if he had no more Thunder left, if he was reduc'd to borrow foreign Forces, how had he it then in his Power to make all the Forces of Asia come down against this Town? Yet after this he suffers 'em to save themselves in Walls of Wood; on whom then was his Anger to fall? What, on the Stones! Rare Diviner! You know not whom these Children shall be that Salamine shall see the destruction of, whether Greeks or Persians; it cannot be avoided but they must be either one or other Army; And do not you as
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at least know, that we shall soon see, you know nothing? You conceal the time of Battle under these Poetical Expressions, When Ceres shall be scatter'd, or when she shall be gather'd in. You are willing to blind us with this pompous Language; but does not every body know, that a Naval Battle is never fought but either in Seed-time or Harvest; doubtless it will not be in Winter. But let what will happen, you will get your self off by the means of this Jupiter, whom Minerva endeavours to appease; if the Greeks lose the Battle, Jupiter is then inexorable; if they gain it, then Jupiter suffered himself to be appeased. And (Apollo) when you say, let 'em fly to Walls of Wood, you Counsel, you do not Divine. I, who know not what Divining is, could have said as much as this, and could have judged as well, that the Fury of the War would fall upon Athens; and that since the Athenians had Ships, the best thing they could do, was to abandon the Town and betake themselves to the Sea.

Such was the Veneration that some great Sects of the Philosophers had for Oracles, and for those very Gods they thought the Authors of 'em. 'Tis very pleasant, that all the Pagan Religion was no more than this one Problem of Philosophy, it is necessary to know whether the Gods take care of Men, or not, before the Question can be answered, Whether we ought to adore 'em, or neglect 'em; the People have already decided it, and are for Adoration, and nothing is to be seen but Temples and Sacrifices; but great Sects of the Philosophers maintain publicly, that these Sacrifices, these Temples, these Adorations, are as to many fruitless and unprofitable things;
and that the Gods are so far from delighting in 'em, that they take no cognizance of 'em. There is scarce a Greek who does not consult the Oracles concerning his Affairs; but this does not prevent their being treated in three great Schools of Philosophy, as absolute Impositions.

Let me beg leave to carry this Reflection a little farther, which may serve to lay more open the Pagan Religion: The Grecians in general had a great deal of Wit, but they were very light, curious, unquiet, and incapable of Moderation in any thing; and, to tell my whole Opinion of 'em, they had so much Wit, that their Reason suffer'd by it. The Romans had quite another Character; they were solid, serious, and industrious, they knew how to pursue a Design, and could foresee at a great distance the Consequences of it. I should not be surpris'd that the Grecians (without thinking of the result of things) should impertinently treat pro and con of every thing; and at the same time that they are making Sacrifices, dispute whether or no these Sacrifices approach the Gods; and consult Oracles without being assur'd whether they are meer Illusions or not. Doubtless the Philosophers concern'd themselves so little in the Government, that they took no care not to shock Religion in their Disputes; and perhaps the People had not Faith enough in the Philosophers to abandon their Religion, or change any thing in it upon their word. In fine, the predominant Passion in the Greeks was to discourse on all Matters at any rate; yet doubtless it is more astonish-
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astonishing to find that the Romans, and those the ablest amongst them too, and who knew best of what consequence Religion was to Politics, durst publish Works that did not only call their Religion in question, but also turn'd it into Ridicule. I speak of Cicero, who in his Books of Divination has spar'd nothing of what was most Sacred at Rome. After he had made it evident enough to his very Adversaries, how great a Folly 'twas to consult the Entrails of Beasts, he drives them at last to this Answer: That the Gods, who are Almighty, change these Entrails in the very moment of the Sacrifice, to the end that we shou'd by them know their Pleasure in things to come. This Answer was given by Chrysippus, by Antipater and Posidonius, all great Philosophers and chief of the Party of the Stoicks.

Ha! what say you? cries Cicero: the very old Women are not so credulous as you are. Can you believe (says he) that the same Calf has the Liver well-dispos'd, if chosen for the Sacrifice by one, and ill-dispos'd, if chosen by another? Can this Disposition of the Liver be chang'd in an instants, to accommodate itself to the Fortune of those that sacrifice? See you not, that it is Chance that makes the choice of Victims? Does not Experience tell you so? For it oftentimes happens that the Entrails of one Victim may foretell something that is unfortunate and terrible, and those which are immediately after sacrifice'd foretell most happy Events. What then becomes of the Menaces of these first Entrails? What! are the Gods so soon appeas'd? But you'll reply, That in a Bull, which Caesar was sacrificing, there was no Heart found; and since this Animal cou'd not live
live without a Heart, it must of necessity be, that the Heart vanish'd just in the moments of the Sacrifice. Is it possible, that you should have Sense enough to know, that this Bull could not live without an Heart, and yet have not enough to perceive, that this Heart could not vanish in a moment, I know not whether? And a little after he adds, Believe me, you ruining all Physicks by defending the Art of Sooth-sayers: for then it is not the ordinary Course of Nature that gives Birth and Death to all things: and there are some Bodies which come from nothing and shall return to nothing. What Naturalist ever held this Opinion?

I cite this Passage of Ciceron's, but as an Example of the extreme Liberty with which he insulted over that Religion which he himself profess'd. In a thousand other places he shows no more Favour to Sacred Fowls, the Flights of Birds, and all the Miracles with which the Annals of the Chief Priest were fill'd. Why did they not Indict him for his Impiety? Why did not all the People regard him with Horror? Why did not all the College of Priests rise up against him? But we have reason to believe that among the Pagans, Religion was a Practice, the Speculation of which was very indifferent. They did as others did, but believ'd what they themselves pleas'd. This Principle is very extravagant; but the People who knew nothing of the Impertinency of it, were content with it; and the Philosophers submitted to it very willingly, because it gave them freedom enough.

So that we may see that all the Pagan Religion was mere Ceremony, in which the Mind bore
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bore no part. The Gods are angry, they are
Thundar is ready to be discharged; how shall
they be appeas'd? Must we repent us of the
Crimes we have committed? Must we retire into the
Baths of that natural Justice which
ought to be among all Men? Not at all; we
need only take a Calf of such a Colour, cal'd
at such a time, and cut the Throat of it with
such a Knife, and this will disarm the Wrath
of all the Gods: Nay further, it is permitted
you to laugh at the Sacrifice, if you have a Mind
to it; 'twill go over the words with you.

Probably 'twas so also with the Oracles; ev
every one believed, that 'twould; however they
ceas'd not to consult 'em. So great a force Cu-
stom has over the Minds of Men, that there is
no need of Reason to jove with it.

CHAP. VIII.

That other Men, besides Philosophers, have
had little Esteem for Oracles.

Histories are full of Oracles, which were
either despis'd by those who receiv'd
'em, or altered according to their
Fancy. * Partis a Lydian, and Sub-
ject of the Persians, being fled to
Cume a Greek Town, the Persians
sent to have him deliver'd up; the Cumeans
presently consult the Oracles of the Branchides,
to know what they ought to do with him; the
Oracle answered, That they shou'd deliver up
Pa-
Pactius. Aristodicus, one of the principal Cumaans, who was not of his mind, obtained, through his Credit, that they should send a second time to the Oracle, and cause'd himself to be made one of the Deputies; but the Oracle made the same answer it had done before. Aristodicus, unsatisfied with this, as he was walking about the Temple, endeavoured to fright away certain little Birds which were building their Nests there; whereupon he presently heard a Voice from the Sanctuary, crying, Detestable Mortal, how dare you fright from this place, those who are under my Protection? And yet, great God, (replied Aristodicus) you order us to expel Pactius, who is under ours? Yes, (answered the God) I do order it, to the end that you who are an impious People, may be the sooner destroyed, and that you may come no more hither to importune me with your Questions. It seems by this, that the God was press'd home, since he had recourse to Railing; but it appears also, that Aristodicus did not overmuch believe, that it was a God who gave these Oracles, because he went about to entrap him by the Comparison of the Birds; and after he had in effect trapp'd him, 'tis likely that he believed him less a God than he did before. The Cumaans themselves were not much perswaded of his being a Delty, since they believed a second Deputation might obtain a contrary Answer, or that at least the God might consider of what he had to say. By the way I observe, that Aristodicus, when he had laid his Snare for the God, could not but foresee, that they would not let him fright away the Birds from
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so holy a Sanctuary without saying any thing to him; and that the Priests were extremly jealous of the Honour of their Temples.

The People of Egina * had ravag’d the Coast of Attica, and the Athenians prepar’d themselves for an Expedition amongst them; at what time there came an Oracle from Delphos, threatening them with utter Ruine in case they made War with those of Egina, within the compass of thirty Years; but when those thirty Years were past, they were only to build a Temple to Aegaeus, and to undertake the War, and then all things wou’d succeed well. The Athenians, who burnt with a Desire of Revenge, split the Oracle in half, and took notice of that part of it only, which related to the Temple of Aegaeus, which they built out of Hand; but as to the thirty Years, they flighted that, and applyed themselves immediately to attack the Aegineans, and obtained all the Advantages imaginable. This was not a particular Person, who had so little Regard for the Authority of Oracles, but a whole Commonwealth, and that a very Superstitious one too.

It is not very easy, to tell what kind of Regard the Pagans had for their Religion: For we said a little while ago, that they contented themselves with the outward Respect, which their Philosophers paid to the Oracles; but this was not always so; for I am not certain, that Socrates refused to offer Incense to the Gods, or behaved himself like other People at the Publick Festivals; but this I am sure of, that the Rabble accused him of Atheism, tho’ they could
Could only guess at his Opinion in this Point; for he never openly explained himself. The People knew well enough what was taught publickly in the Schools of Philosophers; how then could they suffer Opinions, contrary to the established Worship (and often-time even against the Existence of the Gods) to be there maintained? At least, they knew perfectly well, what was play'd upon the Theaters; for those Shows were made for them: and it is sure the Gods were never treated with less Respect, than in the Comedies of Aristophanes. Mercury in his Plutus complains that Sight was restored to the God of Riches, who had till that time been blind, and that Plutus now beginning equally to favour all the World, the other Gods (to whom People no longer made sacrifices to obtain Wealth) were starved for Hunger: And Mercury carries the Humour on so far, as to look out for some mean Employment in a Citizen's House, that he might have Meat and Drink. The Birds of Aristophanes are also very bold. All the Comedy turns upon this, That a certain City of Birds, which was designed to be built in the Air, would interrupt the Trade and Correspondence that was carried on between the Gods and Men; and by rendering the Birds Masters of all, would reduce the Gods to the utmost Misery. I leave you to judge, if this be not mighty devout. Yet this was the same Aristophanes, who endeavoured to excite the Rabble against the pretended Impiety of Socrates: There is therefore something, which I know not how to express, that is often found in the Affairs of this World.
World. And it is apparent by these Examples, and may be made so by an Infinity of others, if there were occasion, that the People were sometimes in a Humour to hear with delight their Religion rallied upon, and turned into a Jest; and if they observed Ceremonies, it was only to free themselves from those Inconveniences which attend an open Neglect of them; but 'tis evident, that at the bottom, they had not overmuch Faith in them: and they had just the same Respect for Oracles: For most commonly, they consulted them, that they might have no occasion to consult them; and if the Answers were not accommodated to their Designs, they did not much trouble themselves to obey them; for perhaps, it was no constant Opinion even amongst the common People, that Oracles were delivered by a Divine Power.

After all this, it would be unnecessary to mention the Histories of those great Captains, who thought it no Crime, to reckon themselves above both Oracles and Auguries. And what is most remarkable, is, that this Disesteem of Religion was practised even in the first Ages of the Roman Commonwealth: In those times of happy Ignorance, when Men were so scrupulously fond of their Religion, and when (as Titus Livius says, in a place which I am going to cite) Philosophy, which taught Men to despise the Gods, was not yet known.

* Papirius made War with the *Liv. 7. 10. Samnites, and in a certain conjuncture of time, when the Roman Army with an extreme Ardor, desired to come to a Battle, the
the sacred Chickens (forsooth) must be consult-
ed; but the Earnestness to fight was so gener-
al, that though the Chickens eat nothing at all,
when they put them out of the Coop, yet those,
who were appointed to observe the Augury,
reported to the Consul, that they had eaten
very well: Upon this, the Consul promised to
his Soldiers both a Battel and Victory. But
however secret this Augury was kept, the De-
ceit broke out at last, and there arose a great
Contest amongst the Keepers of the Chickens,
about the false Report that was made: The
noise of which came to the Ears of Papirius,
who said, That for his part, he had received
a very favourable Augury, and that he was sa-
tisfied with it, and if what was told him were
untrue, let those, whose Business it was to take
the Augury, look to it; for all the Evil would
fall upon their Heads. Immediately therefore
he ordered, that those unhappy People, the
Keepers of the sacred Chickens should be pla-
ced in the first Ranks, and so before the Sig-
nal of the Battel was given, an Arrow (from
whence shot none knew) pierced that poor un-
lucky Keeper who had given a false account of
the Augury; as soon as the Consul heard this
News, he cried out aloud——— The Gods are
here present: The Criminal is punish’d: They have
discharged all their Anger on him, who deserved it,
and we have now all the reason in the World to hope
the best. Then immediately he caused the Sig-
nal to be given, and gained an intire Victory
over the Samnites.

It is very apparent, that the Gods had a less
share in the Death of this poor Keeper than
Papirius; and that the General had a Design, by his Death, to encourage those Soldiers, whom the Falseness of the Augury might have terrifid; for the Romans were acquainted with these Arts and Tricks in the times of their greatest Simplicity.

It must be confessed then, that we should be much in the Wrong, if we should believe these Auguries and Oracles, which the Pagans themselves did not believe. And if we will not think as meanly of them, as some Philosophers, and some Generals of Armies did; yet let us at least have such thoughts of them, as the People themselves sometimes had.

But doubtless (may some object) all the Pagans did not despise Oracles: And some particular Persons, that had no regard for them, are not sufficient intirely to discredit them. And to the Authority of those who did not believe them, we need do no more than oppose the Authority of those that did.

But it may be answered, That these two Authorities are not of equal Strength; for the Testimony of those who uphold a thing that is already established, contributes not much to the support of it; but the Testimony of those who do not believe it, is of Force enough to destroy it; for those who do believe a thing, may perhaps not know the Reasons, that may be given against the belief of it; but those who do not believe it, cannot chuse but know, why others believe it.

It is quite contrary, when a new thing is to be introduced; for in that case, the Testimony of those that believe it, carries more weight with
with it, than the Testimony of those who do not believe it; for 'tis probably to be supposed, that those who believe it, must needs have examined it; and those who do not believe it, may perhaps not have considered of it.

I will not say, that either in the one or the other Case, the Authority of those who believe, or believe not, is a final Decision; but I will say, that without a regard be had to the Reasons on which the two Parties found themselves, sometimes the Authority of one seems more receivable, and sometimes that of the other. Upon the whole Matter, in quitting a common Opinion, or in receiving a new one, we make use of our Reason (whether it be good or bad;) but there is no need of making use of any to reject a new Opinion, or to take up one that is already common; for we have need of strength to resist a Torrent, but we need none to follow it.

And it avails not to the Credit of Oracles, that among those who believe, that there is something in 'em of divine and supernatural, there 'should be found some Philosophers of great name, such as the Stoicks are; for when Philosophers are once prepossess'd with any thing, they are more incurable than the common People, and are as much blinded with Prejudices and false Reasons, with which they uphold their Opinion. The Stoicks in particular (as proud and Supercilious a Sect as they were) held some Opinions which deserv'd pity: How cou'd they choose but believe Oracles, who believ'd Dreams? The great Chrysippus himself adopted some Points for Articles of his Faith, which
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which had been more suitable for the Belief of some silly old Woman.

CHAP. IX.

That the Ancient Christians themselves did not very firmly believe that Oracles were deliver'd by Daemons.

Altho' the Learned Christians in the first Ages, were fond enough of asserting, that Oracles were deliver'd by Daemons, yet they would very often reproach the Heathens with their being imposed upon by their Priests: Which thing was undoubtedly true, since they asserted it, even with the hazard of losing this System of Daemons, which they esteemed so favourable to 'em.

Thus Clement Alexandrinus speaks in his Third Book of Tapisries,

Roast, if you will, of your Oracles, full of Folly and Impertinence, of those of Claros, of Apollo Pythius, of Didymus of Amphius, and of Amphilocus, you may yet add your Augurs and Interpreters of Dreams and Prodigies. Show us in the Presence of Apollo Pythius, those Men who divined by Flower or by Barley, and those who have been so esteemed, because they spoke out of their Bellies. Let the Secrets of the Egyptian Temples, and of the Hettrurian Necromancers remain still in Darkness, for they are certainly all but extravagant Impostures and Deceits, no better than meer

O 2 Cheas-
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Cheating at Dice: And the Goats which are kept for Devination, and the Ravens which are taught to deliver Oracles, are but as the Assistance or Zanies of Mountebanks, who cozen all Mankind.

Eusebius, in the Beginning of his fourth Book of Evangelical Preparations, propofes at large the best Reasons in the World to prove, that Oracles could be no other, than Impostures: And it is upon those very Reasons, that I pretend to support my self, when I come to treat of the Cheats of Oracles in particular.

Nevertheless, I must confess, that tho' Eusebius knew so very well how to prove, that Oracles could not be supernatural, yet he attributes them to Demons; and the Authority of a Man so well instructed with the Reasons on both sides, is a very great Encouragement to the Party which he embraces.

But it is to be noted, that after Eusebius had very well proved, that Oracles could be no other than the Impostures of Priestfs, he assures us (without either destroying or weakening those first Proofs) that for all this, they were delivered by Demons. But he ought to have cited some unsuspected Oracle, which had been delivered in such Circumstances, that although many others might be imputed to the Artifices of Priestfs, yet that could not. But Eusebius has done to such thing. This is, as if he should say, I clearly see, that all the Oracles can be no other than Cheats; but yet, I will not believe them to be so, because it serves my purpose, that the Devil should now and then enter into an Oracle.

This is a very lamentable kind of Reasoning. But
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But I must confess, if \textit{Eusebius} (in the Circumstances of the Times which he lived in) durst not have said openly, that \textit{Oracles} were not the Works of \textit{Damos}, it had been excusable; but then in seeming to maintain that they were so, he ought to have managed his Arguments in such a way, that he might have insinuated the contrary with the best Address he was capable of. But we are at liberty to guess at the Reasons, that guided \textit{Eusebius} in this Matter, according to the Esteem we have of him: For my own part, I believe clearly, that he asserted these Oracular \textit{Damos}, rather by way of Apology, and from a forced Respect he had for the common Opinion, than on any other Account.

There is a Passage of \textit{Origen}, in his Seventh Book against \textit{Celsus}, which sufficiently proves that he attributed \textit{Oracles} to \textit{Damos}, only to accommodate himself to the Times, and to the Disputes, which in that Age were between the Christians and the Pagans: \textit{I might} (said he) \textit{make use of the Authority of Aristotle, and the Peripatetics, to render the Pythian Oracle suspected: I could draw from Epicurus and those of his Sett, an Infinity of things, that would discredit Oracles; and I could easily make it appear, that the Greeks themselves made no great Account of them; but conceding that they were not Fictions, nor Impostures, let us examine the Case a little more carefully, and consider, whether there were any Necessity, that a God should have any Business there, and if it were not more reasonable to believe, that they were managed by evil Damos and Genii, that were Enemies to Mankind.}

It is sufficiently evident, that \textit{Origen} was inclined to believe of \textit{Oracles}, as we do; but the
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Pagans, who used them for a Proof of the Divinity of their Religion, had no Reason to consent, that they were but the Artifices of their Priests: So, that to gain a little upon the Pagans, there was a necessity of yielding to them, what they maintained with so much Obstinacy, and to let them see, that tho' there might be something of Supernatural in the Oracles, yet there was no reason to say, that a true Divinity was concerned in them; and so Demons were to be brought upon the Stage.

'Tis true, that it had been much better wholly to have excluded even these Demons from Oracles; and by that means, the greatest Blow would indeed have been given to the Pagan Religion that can be imagined. But all the World perhaps did not enter so deep into this Matter, and they thought they had done enough, when by the Hypothesis of Demons, (which solves the whole Business in two words,) they disparaged all those Miracles, which the Pagans could allege for their false Worship.

This, it is probable, was the Cause, why in the first Ages of the Church, Men so generally embraced this Opinion concerning Oracles. For we see clearly enough into the Darkness of remote Antiquity, to discover, that Christians did not hold this Opinion so much for the Truth, which they found in it, as for the Advantages, which it gave them in their Disputes against Paganism: And could they be born again in the Age wherein we live, I doubt not, but that being then deliver'd, like us, from those Strange Notions, that obliged them to that Hypothesis, they would have had (a)-
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(almost all of them) the same Diseasteem of Oracles, as we have at this time.

Hitherto, we have only taken away the Prejudices that are contrary to our Opinion, and which are drawn, either from the System of the Christian Religion, or else from Philosophy, with the general Consent of both Pagans and Christians. We have answered all this; not only by making a simple Defence, but very often by starting Objections; but now we shall make our Assaulits with with greater Vigour, and demonstrate by all those particular Circumstances, which we can remark in Oracles, that they never ought to have been attributed to Damons.

CHAP. X.

That Oracles were corrupted by Bribery.

It was so easie a matter to corrupt these Oracles, that it was very evident that they were managed by Men. The Pythian Priestess Philipisæs, said Demosthenes, when he was complaining that the Oracles of Delphos were always conformable to the Interest of Philip.

* When Cleomenes, King of Sparta, was minded to dethrone Demaratus, the former King, on pretence that he was not the Son of Ariston his Predecessor, and that Ariston himself had complained that his Son was born a little too soon after his Marriage; the Oracle was consulted on so diffi-
cult a Question; for the thing was of such a Nature, that it cou’d be decided only by the Gods. But Cleomenes himself went beforehand to engage the Chief Priestess of Delphos, and so she declar’d that Demaratus was not the Son of Ariston. The Cheat was sometime after discov’d, and the Priestess depriv’d of her Dignity; for they were bound to revenge this Dishonour done to their Oracles, and to endeavour to repair their lost Credit.

* Herod. Lib. 5.* During the time that Hippias was Tyrant of Athens, some Citizens whom he had banish’d, obtain’d of the Pythian Priestess, by the force of Mony, that when the Lacedemonians shou’d come to consult her (no matter on what affairs) she should always tell ’em, they must deliver Athens from Tyrany. And the Lacedemonians, to whom the same thing was always repeated, whatever they came about, believ’d at last, that the Gods wou’d never Pardon them, if they contemn’d their so frequent Orders; and thereupon they took up Arms against Hippias, tho’ he were their Ally.

If the Damons delivered Oracles, they were always full of Complaisance to those Princes that were once become Redoubted; and ’tis to be noted that Hell had a very great regard for Alexander and Augustus. Some Historians tell us plainly that Alexander had a mind by his absolute Authority to make himself the Son of Jupiter Ammon, both for his Interest and the Honour of his Mother, who was suspected to have had a Gallant much less considerable than Jupiter; and they add, that before he went to the Temple, he caus’d the God to be adver-

- tis’d
tis'd of his Will and Pleasure; and the God very honestly obeyed his Command. Other Authors hold, That the Priests found out of themselves this way of flattering Alexander. There is none but Plutarch that grounds this Divinity of Alexander on a Mistake of the Priest of Ammon, who saluting this King, and intending to say to him in Greek, Ob my Son, pronounc'd a σ for a ν, (for he was a Lybian, and knew not well how to pronounce the Greek;) and the Words with this Change signifie, Ob Son of Jupiter. And the whole Court fail'd not to construe this Mistake of the Priest, to the Advantage of Alexander; and without doubt the Priest himself made it pass for an Inspiration of the God who had directed his Tongue, and so by Oracles afterwards confirm'd his ill Pronunciation. This last manner of relating this History pleases me extremely, for I love to find very little Originals give rise to mighty Things; this seems to me to be probable, and a Mockery worthy of sporting Fortune.

* Augustus was so in Love with Livia, that he took her by force from her Husband, big with Child as she was; and so impatient was his Passion, that he would not deferr his Marriage till she was delivered, but the Action being something extraordinary, the Oracle was consulted about it; who knew well how to make its Court to foglorious a Monarch, and was not only content to approve the Marriage, but assur'd him, that Weddings never succeeded better, than when the Bride was.
was already with Child. This seems to me a very strange Maxim.

There were at Sparta but two Families, out of which they might choose their Kings. But Lysander, one of the greatest Men that ever Sparta bred, fram'd a Design to take away this Distinction, too advantageous for those two Families, and too injurious to all the rest; and to open a way to Royalty for all those who had Merit enough to pretend to it: In order to this, he contriv'd so perplex'd a Plot, that I admire how a Man of Wit could hope to draw any Success from it. Plutarch says very well, that it was like a Mathematical Demonstration, to which no Man arrives but by tedious Methods. There was a Woman in Pontus, who pretended to be big with Child by Apollo; Lysander cast his Thoughts upon this Son of Apollo, intending to make use of him when he shou'd be born; (this it was to have a very great Foresight) and hecauses a Report to be spread abroad, that the Priests of Delphos had in their possession very ancient Oracles which they were not permitted to read, because Apollo had reserv'd that Privilege for some one that should come of his Blood, and who should come to Delphos to justify his Descent. The Child of the Woman at Pontus was to be this Son of Apollo; and it was contriv'd that amongst those mysterious Oracles, to closely conceal'd, there should be one found out, which should declare to the Spartans, that they ought to give the Crown to Defert only, without having any regard to Families. So that now nothing remain'd but to shape up some Oracles;
to get this Son of Apollo (who was called Silenus) into the Project, to make him come to Delphos, and to bribe the Priests. All this was done, which seems to me very surprizing; for what strange Machines must they have made use of, for the accomplishing so great a Design? Silenus comes to Greece, and prepares to make himself known at Delphos for the Son of Apollo; but, as ill luck would have it, one of Lyfander's Creatures having some Terrors upon him; at last when he found himself embark'd in so dangerous an Affair, spoil'd all.

There is scarce a more remarkable Example to be found in all History of the Corruption of Oracles; but in reporting it, I will not dissemble a Truth, which my Author says nothing of; which is, that Lyfander had before endeavour'd to corrupt many other Oracles, but could not accomplish it. Dodona refused to take his Money, Jupiter Ammon was inflexible, and even the Priests of the place sent Deputies to Sparta to accuse Lyfander; but by the force of his Credit he got himself clear of that Affair. The great Priests of Delphos denied to fell him her Voice. And this makes me believe, that there were in Delphos two Colleges, which held no Communication one with another, the one of Priests the other of Priests: for Lyfander, who could not corrupt the great Priests, could yet sufficiently corrupt the Priests. The Priests were those only who deliver'd the Oracles Viva voce, and who, with a thousand antick Motions and Grimaces, acted the Poss'd on the Tripos, and seemed to rage, with the Inspirations of the God; but in
in all probability the Priests had a Ware-house of written Prophecies, of which they were the Masters, the Dispensers, and the Interpreters.

It is not to be doubted, but that the Priests, for the Honour of their Trade, would seem very nice and scrupulous to those who desir'd to Bribe 'em, especially when things were requir'd wherein there was no reason to hope for much Success; such as was the Novelty, which Lysander had a design to introduce into the Government of Sparta: and perhaps the Faction of Agesilaus, which was against that of Lysander, was somewhat jealous of his Project, and had been before-hand with the Oracles. Nor is it to be imagin'd, that the Priests of Ammon would have taken the pains to have come from the farthest part of Libia to Sparta, to have accused so great a Man as Lysander, if there had not been a very good Understanding between their Oracles and his Enemies, who encouraged them to accuse him.

CHAP. XI.

Of the Erection of new Oracles.

The Oracles, which were sometimes erect- ed anew, do as much weaken the Hypothesis of Demons, as the Oracles that were corrupted by Bribery.

After the Death of Ephesius, Alexander, to comfort himself, would needs have it believed, that Ephesius was a God; to which, all his Cour-
Courtiers contented without any difficulty: And immediately, Temples were erected in many Cities to Ephesion; Festivals were instituted to his Honour, Sacrifices were made to him, miraculous Cures were attributed to him, and in fine, (that nothing at all might be wanting) they made him deliver Oracles. Lucian says, that Alexander, who was at first astonished to see the Divinity of Ephesion have such Success, believed it himself at length to be true, and found a great deal of Pleasure, in thinking not only that he himself was a God, but that he had also the Power of making Gods.

Adrian committed the same Folly for the lovely Antinous: In Honour of whose Memory he built the City of Antinopolis, he consecrated Temples and Prophets to him (says St. Jerome:). Now there were no Prophets, but in those Temples where there were Oracles; and there is yet remaining this Greek Inscription:

To Antinous,


After this, we need not wonder, that Augustus also delivered Oracles, as we find it in Prudentius: And certainly Augustus was as fit to be worshipped as Antinous or Ephesion, who according to all likelihood, owed their Divinity only to their Beauty.
Without doubt, these new Oracles caused even those, who were the least capable of thinking, to make Reflections upon them. Was there not reason to believe, that these were of the same Nature with the Ancient ones? And to make a due Judgment on the beginnings of those of Amphiaras, Trophonius, Orpheus, and of Apollo himself, they needed no more than to consider those of Epaestion, Aminous and Augustus.

'Tis plain however, that they were not in like Credit with those of more ancient Dates, and that there is a vast difference between them; for they stinted the Gods of the new Edition to certain Answers, that were necessary for the flattering of Princes; but for any thing else, they were not seriously consulted.

For when Questions of Importance were to be asked, they went to Delphos. The ancient Tripodes had been in Possession of Futurity, time out of Mind; and the word of a good Sage, experienced God, was far more authentick than that of these Upstarts, who were less versed in the Trade. The Roman Emperors, whose Interest it was to advance and set a value on the Divinity of their Predecessors (since themselves claimed the same) would have endeavoured to have render'd the Oracles of the deified Emperors (such as Augustus was) more celebrated, if it had not been that the People, accustomed to their ancient Oracles, could not have the same Confidence in these; for I would willingly believe, that, what Inclination soever they had to the most ridiculous Superstitions, yet they laugh'd at these new Oracles, and in general,
neral, at all the Consecrations of new Gods: For how could they possibly take the Eagle, which flew out of the flaming Funeral Pile of a Roman Emperor, to be the Soul of that Emperor, that was taking its Flight to Heaven?

How then came it to pass, that People were deceived at the first Erection of Gods and Oracles? Thus it was, as I conjecture: As for the Gods, Paganism had only two principal sorts of them, either Gods who were supposed to be essentially of a Divine Nature, or Gods which did not become so, till after they had been of a humane Nature first. The former sort were declared Gods by the Learned, or by the Legislators with a multitude of Mysteries; and the People neither saw them, nor ever had seen them: The second sort (tho' the whole World knew that they) had been Men, yet they) were made Gods by the Inclination of the People, in Memory of their Vertues. They framed to themselves a very elevated Idea of the one sort, because they were above their View; and of the other, because they loved them. But they could not have that Devotion for a Roman Emperor, who was only made a God by the Favour and Order of the Court, and not by the Love of the People, and who besides this, was known so very lately to have been a Man.

As for the Oracles, their first Establishment is not difficult to unfold: For, find me but half a dozen Persons, whom I can perswade that it is not the Sun that makes the Day, and I will not despair of prevailing with a whole Nation to Embrace the same Opinion: For how-
however ridiculous any thing seems at first, if you can but maintain it for some time; so that it gains the Authority of Antiquity, it is then sufficiently proved.

There was on the top of Parnassus a Hole, out of which an Exhalation came, which was of such a Nature, that it made Goats dance and caper, by fuming into their Heads; and perhaps some Body, whose Head was filled with this Exhalation became an Enthusiast, fell a talking without knowing what he said, and by chance spoke truth. Immediately, there was something Divine fancied to be in this Exhalation, and that it contained the knowledge of futurity, then they begin to approach this Hole with Veneration, and Ceremonies are by little and little introduced. Thus in all probability, the Oracle of Delphos was at first erected. And as it owed its Original to an Exhalation, which infected the Head, there was a necessity that the Pythian Priestess should be in a Fury, when she was to prophesy; but in the greatest part of the other Oracles, Fury was not practiced. Let but one Oracle be set up, and you need not doubt but a thousand will follow the Example; for if the Gods can speak in one, why should they not do as well in others? The People struck with the Wonder of the thing, and finding of what use it would be, and covetous of the Profit, which they expected from it, desired nothing more than to see Oracles set up in every place; and in time, all these Oracles got the Advantage of Antiquity, which stood them in great stead. And it could not be expected, that the new ones should have such Success; since
since they were established by Princes: whereas the People are most willing to believe, what they make themselves.

Add to all this, that at the time of the first Institution both of Gods and Oracles, Ignorance was much greater than it was afterwards. Philosophy was not then known in the World, and the most extravagant Superstitions had met with no contradiction from thence. 'Tis true, that those we call the People are never mighty knowing; yet the Dullness, with which they are always posses'd, receives some difference according to the Ages in which they live. But there are some Ages wherein all the World are the People, and those times without comparison are the most favourable for the introduction of Errors. 'Tis no wonder then, that the People had a less esteem for the new Oracles, than for the ancient ones; but this makes not the old Oracles any whit better than the new ones. Now, either a Daemon went to lodge in the Statue of Epheslion, to deliver Oracles from thence (as soon as it pleas'd Alexander to erect one to him as to a God;) or if the Statue deliver'd Oracles without this Daemon, then that of Apollo Pyslius might do so as well. And it seems to me very strange and surprizing, that the Fancy of Alexander should be able to send a Daemon to take possession of a Statue, which by that means only was to become an eternal occasion of Error to all Men.
Of the Places where Oracles were.

We shall now enter upon the History of those Artifices and Cheats, what the Priests practis'd: which contains many things of Antiquity very agreeable and particular.

Countries that were mountainous (and by consequence full of Holes, and Caverns) were always fullest of Oracles; such was Boetia, which anciently, as Plutarch says, had a number of them. Where by the way you may observe that the Boetians had the repute of being the foolishest Nation of the World; and therefore it was a fit Country for Oracles, being full of Blockheads and Caverns.

I cannot believe that the first Establishment of Oracles was a design'd Cheat; but that the People fell into some Superstition which gave 'em a beginning, and that afterwards Men of Wit made their advantages of 'em: For the Weakness of the People is oftentimes greater than could have been foreseen; and many times those that deceive 'em, think of nothing less, until they themselves give some opportunity for the Fraud. And my Opinion is, that Oracles were not therefore placed in Boetia, because tis mountainous; but because the Oracle of Delphos had by chance its beginning there, after the manner which we have related, therefore others, that were made in Imitation of that in the same Country, were situated also in...
in the Caverns; the Conveniences of which for that purpose, were very well known to the Priests.

This Custom afterwards spread it self everywhere; for the Pretence of Divine Exhalations render'd these Caverns necessary: and besides Caverns of themselves effect one with a certain Horror, which does not a little advance Superstition; and in things that are only to make impressions on the Imaginations of Men, nothing is to be neglected. It may be also, that the situation of Delphos contributed to the making it be esteem'd as a holy Town; it was built on a small Level which was half way up the Mountain of Parnassus, and encompass'd with Precipices which fortify'd it without the help of Art: That part of the Mountain which was above it, had the resemblance of a Theater; and the Voice of Men, and the Sound of Trumpets was multiply'd by the Echoes of the Rocks. Do not you believe then, that they knew how to make even these Echoes of great use to 'em?

The Advantages of the Priests and the Majesty of the Oracles, do equally require these Caverns; for which reason there was no great number of these Prophetick Temples situated on Plains; but yet there were some, whose Defects the Priests knew well enough how to remedy, and instead of natural Caverns, to accommodate 'em with artificial ones, that is to say, what they call Sanctuaries, which were a sort of Caves where the Divinity perpetually resided, and where none but the Priests ever enter'd.
When the Pythian Priestess placed herself upon the Tripod; it was in her Sanctuary, an obscure place at some distance from a certain little Chamber, wherein those who came to consult the Oracles were to stand. The Entrance of this Sanctuary was all covered with Boughs of Lawrel, by which means those who had the liberty of approaching it, could make no Discoveries.

From whence do you think proceeds the diversity that is to be found in the Description which the Ancients give of their Oracles? It is because they never saw what pass'd in the most sacred Recedes of their Temples.

For example, They agree not among themselves about the Oracle of Dodona, and yet what could be better known to the Greeks? Aristotle, (as Suidas reports) writes, that at Dodona there were two Columns, upon one of which there was a Bason of Brass, and upon the other a Statue of a Child who held a Whip, the Cords of which being also of Brass made a noise against the Bason, when they were agitated by the Wind.

Demon (according to the same Suidas) says, that the Oracle of Jupiter at Dodona is all encompass'd with Basons, of which, when any one is pushed against the next, the Motion is communicated all round to the rest, and they make a Din, which continues for some time.

Others say, that there was a resounding Oak, which shook its Branches and Leaves together, all the while the Oracle was consulted; and its meaning was pronounced by the Priestesses called Dodonides.
It is plain from all this, that there was no-
th ing certain but the Noise, which was to be
heard from without; but not seeing the in-
ward Sanctuary, where the Oracle resided, they
only knew, but by Conjecture, and the falla-
cious Reports of the Priests what caus'd this
Noise. Yet we find in History, that some
few had the Privilege to enter into these San-
duaries; but they were Persons of no less Qua-
ality than Alexander and Vespasian. Strabo re-
ports from Callisthenes, that Alexander enter'd
alone with the Priest into the Sanctuary of
Ammon, and that all the rest heard the Oracle
only from without.

Tacitus also relates, that Vespasian, when he
was at Alexandria, (having already a Design
upon the Empire) would needs consult the
Oracle of Serapis; but before he enter'd, he
made every body quit the Temple; and yet
for all this, perhaps he did not enter into the
Sanctuary. But the Instances of this Privilege
are very rare; for my Author averss, that he
never knew of any other than these two; un-
less you will add what Tacitus says of Titus, to
whom the Priest of Paphian Venus discovered
in secret many great things, concerning the
Designs which he had then in hand. But yet
this Example proves less than that of Vespasian,
that the Priests allow'd great Men the liberty
of entering into the Sanctuary of their Tem-
ples. Doubtless one ought to have a great deal
of Credit with the Priests, to oblige them to
discover the Arcana of their Mysteries; but
they did it only to Princes, whose Interest
they knew it was to keep the Secret; and who,
in the Circumstances which they were then in, had some particular reason to raise and not lessen the Reputation of Oracles.

In these dark Sanctuaries it was, that all the Machines of the Priests lay; and they enter'd into them by intricate Paths under Ground. Rufinus describes to us the Temple of Serapis full of covert Ways: and (to bring a Testimony yet stronger than his) do not the Holy Scriptures discover to us the Impostures of the Priests of Belus, who had a private Conveyance to enter secretly into his Temple, and to take away the Meat which was there offer'd to him? It seems to me, that this History alone ought to decide the whole Question in our favour; for we there have an account of one of the Miracles of Paganism, which was the most universally believ'd, how that the Gods took the pains to come and Eat the consecrated Meat, themselves. Do the Scriptures attribute this Prodigy to Demons? Not at all; but to the Priests, who were Impostors. And it is in this place alone that the Scriptures vouchsafe to give the description of a Pagan Miracle; and by not advertising us that the rest were not of the same nature, they give us plainly to understand that they were. After all, how much easier was it to perswade People that the Gods descended into Statues to speak to 'em, and give 'em wholesome Instructions, than that they came down to eat the Members of Goats and Sheep? And therefore surely if it was the Priests that eat, and not the Gods; by much stronger reason, it was they that pronounced the Oracles in their stead.

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The Cavities of the Sanctuary, increas'd the Voice, and caus'd rebounding Echoes, which imprinted a sort of awful Terror in all that approach'd it: you see also in all the Poets that the Pythian Priestesses strain'd their Voices, so much beyond the pitch of Nature, that they appear'd to be more than Humane. Perhaps too that sort of * Trumpet which multiplies the sound, was not then altogether unknown: and it may be Sir Samuel Moreland, has but reviv'd this Secret, which the Pagan Priests knew before him; tho' they chose rather to get Profit by concealing it, than Honour by publishing it. And Father Kirker assures us that Alexander had one of these Instruments, with which he made himself be heard by his whole Army at the same time. There is one little thing which I will not forget, because it serves to demonstrate the extream Application which the Priests had to Cheating. From the Sanctuary, or bottom of the Temple, there came out sometimes a very agreeable Vapour which fill'd all the place where the Consalters were: It was the arrival of the God, you must know, that perfum'd all. Judge then, if Men who carried on their Impostures so curiously as to descend to these Trifles, would neglect any thing that was essential.

P 4 C H A P.
Of the Distinctions of Days, and other Mysteries of Oracles.

The Priests neglected not any kind of precaution; and therefore they had certain Days on which no Man was permitted to consult the Oracle. This had a mysterious Air, which is still much practic'd in like Matters; but yet the chief Advantage which they drew from it, was, That they could put you off with this Pretext till another time, either if they had no mind to give you any Answer at all, or if they thought fit to have this time of silence for the taking their Measures and making their Preparatives.

On occasion of these pretended unlucky Days, there was deliver'd to Alexander one of the pleasantest Oracles that ever was. He went to Delphos to consult the God, and the Priests, pretending that it was not then a lawful time to Interrogate, would not enter into the Temple. Alexander, who was very rough and impatient, took the Priests by the Arm, and led her in by force; whereupon she cry'd out, *Ah, my Son, you are not to be resisted*; *I desire no more, (says Alexander) this Oracle is enough for me.*

But the Priests had got another Secret to gain time when they pleased: Before they would consult the Oracles they must Sacrifice; and if the Entrails of the Victim were not luc-
ky, then the God was not in an Humour to answer; now none judged of the Victims but the Priests: and, for the most part (as it appears by many Examples) they were alone when they examin’d ’em: And often, to delay the time, they would make Men begin their Sacrifice a new, and bring a second Victim, tho’ they had already offer’d one that had the finest Heart and Liver in the World.

What were call’d the Mysteries and secret Ceremonies of the Gods, were without doubt the best Artifices the Priests could invent to keep People in the Dark; and yet they could not so well hide the Juggle, but that the Cheat would be suspected by many Persons; and therefore they contrived among themselves to establish certain Mysteries, which should ingage those that were initiated into them to an inviolable Secrecy.

’Tis true there were Mysteries in those Temples where there were no Oracles, but there were no Oracles, but what had Mysteries; as for Instance in that of Delphos: Plutarch, in his Dialogues, so often cited, says, That there was no Person in the Town of Delphos, nor in all that Country, that was not initiated into their Mysteries, and so every body had his Dependence on the Priests; and if any one had dared to have opened his Mouth against ’em, they presently cried out, O the Atheist! O the impious Man! and he would have drawn upon himself, by his plain Dealing, such Inconveniences as he could never have got quit of. But yet, if there had been no such Mysteries, the Inhabitants of Delphos, would have been al-
ways obliged to have conceal'd the Knavery of their Priests; for Delphos was a City which had no other Revenue but that of its Temple, and was maintain'd only by its Oracle; but for all that, the Priests were not contented till they had secured the People to themselves by a double Tie, and so they annexed Superstition to their Interest. And without doubt a Man who had spoken ill of their Oracles, would have been wondrous well received in such a Town.

Those, who were initiated into their Mysteries, gave also further Security for their Discretion; for they were oblig'd to make a Confession to their Priests of all the most private Actions of their Lives: so that by this means they became Slaves to their Priests, that their own Secrets might be kept.

It was upon this sort of Confession that a Lacedæmonian, who was going to initiate himself into the Mysteries of Samothrace, spoke roundly thus to the Priest: *If I have committed any Crimes, surely the Gods are not ignorant of them.*

Another answer'd almost after the same manner: *Is it to you, or to God we ought to confess our Crimes?* It is to God, says the Priest. *Well then, retire thou,* answered the Lacedæmonian, *and I'll confess 'em to God.* These Lacedæmonians were not very full of the Spirit of Devotion, and I do not doubt but there might have been some Men wicked enough to go and make a false Confession, to get himself initiated into their Mysteries, and then afterwards to make a Discovery of all their Extravagancies, and publish the Cheats of the Priests.
I believe that this Misfortune may have happened, for tho' Priests used all possible means to prevent such Discoveries: They observed narrowly what Persons they were, with whom they had to do; and, I'll warrant you, the two Lacedæmonians, whom we have mentioned, were not admitted. Besides, they declared the Epicureans incapable of being initiated into their Mysteries, because they were a sort of Men, who made it their Business to laugh at them; and I believe, they never delivered Oracles to them: Nor was it very difficult to know them; for all those among the Greeks, who applied themselves to Literature, made choice of some Sect of Philosophy, or other, and took their Appellation from that Sect, almost as we do from a Country. For Example, there were three Demetriuses, which were thus distinguished; one was Demetrius the Cynick, the other, Demetrius the Stoick, and the third, Demetrius the Peripatetick. This Custom of excluding the Epicureans from all Mysteries, was so general, and so necessary for the securing of Sacred Things, that it was made use of by that grand Cheat, whose Life Lucian describes so agreeably; I mean that Alexander, who fooled the Greeks so long a time with his Serpents: But he also added the Christians to the Epicureans; for he thought one no better than the other: And before he began his Ceremonies, he always cried, Let the Christians be put out. To whom the People answered in a kind of Chorus, Let the Epicureans be put out also. Nay, he did far worse than all this; for seeing himself tormented by these two sorts of
of People, (who, tho’ pushed by different Interests, yet confin’d together to turn his Ceremonies into Ridicule) he declared, that Pontus (where he then lived) was filled with wicked People, and that the God, whose Prophet he was, would speak no more, if they did not rid themselves of them; and upon this, they murdered all the Epicureans and the Christians.

Daphnean Apollo, in the Suburbs of Antioch, was in the same Uneasiness, when, in the time of Julian the Apostate, he answered all those, who asked him the Cause of his Silence, that they must lay the Blame on certain dead People, who were interred in the Neighbourhood. These dead People were Christian Martyrs, and among the rest, St. Babila. Now the current Opinion is, that it was the Presence of these blessed dead Bodies, which deprived the Daemons of the Power of speaking in the Oracle; but ’tis more probable, that the great concourse of Christians, which daily visited the Sepulchers of these Martyrs, incommode the Priests of Apollo, who did not care that such clear-sighted Enemies should be Witnesses of their Actions; and therefore they endeavoured by this false Oracle, to obtain of the Pagan Emperor, that he would cause these Bodies, of which the God complained, to be cast out from thence.

But let us return to the Artifices of the Priests, of which the Oracles are full: And to comprehend in one Reflection alone, all those that can be made upon them, I would fain have some one tell me, why the Daemons could not
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not predict what was to come, unless they were in Holes, in Caverns and in obscure Places? And why they did not animate a Statue, in some common Road, where four High-ways met, exposed on all sides to the View of the World? But it may perhaps be said, that those Oracles, which were given in answer to sealed Letters, and those that were delivered by Dreams, could not have been without Demons; but 'twill be very easy for us to show, that they had nothing in them more wonderful and miraculous than the rest.

C H A P. XIV.

Of Oracles that were delivered in Answer to Sealed Letters.

The Priests were not so scrupulous in that Point, as not to unseal the Letters that were brought them. The Custom was to lay them upon the Altar: After which the Temple was to be shut; but the Priests knew very well how to enter, without being perceived. Or else, they put the Letters into the Hands of the Priests, that they might sleep upon them, and receive in a Dream the Answer, which they were to return: And in both Cases, they had the leisure to open them privately. For the doing this, they had many secret Arts: Some of which we see practised by the false Prophet of Lucian. And they are to be seen in Lucian himself by any one, that has the
the Curiosity to know how the Letters of the Ancients were to be opened, without its being perceived that they were so.

Certainly, they made use of some of these Secrets, to open those Letters, that the Governor of Cilicia (of whom Plutarch speaks) had sent to the Oracle of Mopsus, which was at Mallus, a City of that Province. The Governor knew not what to think of the Gods; for he was possessed by the Epicureans with many Doubts, which they had put into his Head: So that, he was resolved, as Plutarch pleasantly observes, to send a Spie among the Deities, to learn what he could of them: So he gave him a Letter very carefully sealed, to carry to the Oracle of Mopsus. This Envoy came, and, as the Custom was, laid his Letter upon the Altar, and himself slept in the Temple, where he saw in a Dream, a Man, very well made, who said to him, Black. He carried back this Answer to the Governor with his Letter sealed just as he sent it, to all appearance. The Answer seemed very ridiculous to the Epicureans, that were at Court; but himself was struck with Astonishment and Wonder at it; and opening his Letter before them, he showed them what he had written, which was this Question: Shall I Sacrifice to you a white or a black Bullock? After this Miracle, he was all his Life very much devoted to the God Mopsus. We will hereafter discover to you the Mystery of the Dream; but it is sufficient at present to tell you, that there is no doubt, but that the Letters were opened and sealed again with great Dexterity and Address, for
for what necessity was there of sending a Letter to the Temple, if a Daemon was to make the Answer? And if it sometimes happened so, that the Priests durst not venture to open the Letter, then they endeavoured by their Cunning, to discover what Men came to the Oracle about; for they were commonly Persons of Note, and who had some Design or Passion in their Heads, that was not unknown to the World. And the Priests had so much Conversation with those that came to consult, either at their Sacrifices, or during the Delays, that were made by the Oracle, before it would answer, that it was not difficult to draw from their own Mouths (or at least to conjecture) what was the Cause of their Voyage: They made them offer one Sacrifice after another, till they had gotten some Light into their Affairs: They put them also into the Hands of certain little Officers of the Temple, who, (under pretence of showing them the Antiquities, the Statues, the Paintings, and the Offerings,) managed the Matter so well, as to pump many things out of them concerning the Business which they came about. These Antiquaries (like those who live upon this Trade now in Italy) were in all the Temples that were any thing considerable. They knew by Heart all the Miracles that were done, they set forth to you the Power and Wonders of their God, and they recounted to you a long Story of every Present that was consecrated to him. And therefore, Lucian says very pleasantly, that all this sort of Men lived and subsisted on Fables; and that in Greece, they would have been very an-
angry to have been told truth, tho' it had cost them nothing. If those who came to consult the Oracle, would not tell all themselves, yet their Servants could not hold their Peace. You must know, that in an Oracle-Town, there were scarce any Persons but Oracle-Officers: Some were Prophets and Priests; others, Poets (who put into Verse the Oracles, which were delivered in Prose;) others, simple Interpreters; others, little Sacrificers, who killed the Victims, and examined their Intrails; others, Sellers of Perfumes and Incense, or of Beasts for the Sacrifices; others, Antiquaries: and in fine, all the rest were but Inn-keepers, whom the great resort of Strangers enriched. Now all these People were for the Interest of the Oracle and the God: And if by the means of the Servants belonging to these Strangers, they discovered any thing worth the knowing, you need not doubt but they soon advertized the Priests of it.

The false Prophet, Alexander, who had set up his Oracle in Pontus, had Correspondents even in Rome it self, who sent him an Account of the most secret Affairs of those who went to Consult him; by this means he could answer, without the Trick of opening their Letters. And these Correspondencies were doubtless not unknown to the Priests of Apollo of Claros, if it be true, that it was sufficient only to tell them the Names of those that consulted them. Tacitus speaks thus of them in his Second Book of Annals: Germanicus went to consult Apollo of Claros, where a Woman does not deliver the Oracles, as at Delphos; but a Man who
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chosen out of certain Families, and who is almost always Miletus; you need tell him only the Number and Names of them that come to consult him; and then he retires into a Grotto, and having taking some Water from a certain secret Fountain there, he answers you in Verse, to whatever you have in your Thoughts, though for the most part, he is a very ignorant Fellow.

Here we may observe, that the Oracle of Delphos was committed to the management of a Woman, because she had nothing else to do there, but to make ridiculous and antick Gestures, and to act the being possessed and inspired; but because that of Claros had more Difficulty in it, therefore a Man only was to be intrusted with it. We may further remark, that the Ignorance of the Prophet, (which was indeed the greatest Wonder of the Oracle,) could not be very easily discovered; for the Demon of the Oracle, as much a Demon as he was, laid it down for an indispensable Rule, that they must bring him the Names of those who consulted him. But we are not come to that yet; it is sufficient to have shown how they could answer, not only to seal'd Letters, but also to simple Thoughts. It is true, they could not answer to the Thoughts of all the World: For what the Priest of Claros did for Germanicus, he could not do for a private Citizen of Rome.
CHAP. XV.

Of Oracles delivered in Dreams.

The Number of Oracles delivered in Dreams is very great; for this Way had more of Wonder in it than any other, and yet was not very difficult in the Practice. The most famous of all these Oracles was that of Trophonius in Boeotia: Trophonius was but a simple Heroe, but his Oracle was delivered with more Ceremonies than those of any God.

Pausanias himself, who had been to consult it, and who had pass'd through all its Ceremonies, has left us a very ample Description of it: And I believe, that an exact Abridgment of his Relation will not be disagreeable to the Reader.

Before any Body descended into the Den of Trophonius, they were obliged to pass a certain number of Days in a kind of little Temple or Chapel call'd the Chapel of good Fortune, and of the good Genius. During this time they used Expiations of all sorts; they abstain'd from hot bathings; they wash'd themselves very often in the River Hercinas; they sacrific'd to Trophonius and all his Family, to Apollo, to Jupiter, furnam'd the King, to Saturn, to Juno, to one Ceres Europa, who had been Nurse to Trophonius; and they lived only upon the Flesh of the Sacrifices. It is also more than probable that the Priests lived upon nothing else. The Entrails of all these Victims were to be examined,
amined, to see if Trophonius thought fit that the Consulters should descend into his Den; but if these had yielded all the most happy Omens in the World, yet it would not do; for the decisive Entrails were those of a certain Ram, which was to be sacrific’d last; and if they were favourable, then the Consulters were led in the Night to the River Hercinæ, where two young Lads about thirteen or fourteen years Old, rubbed all their Bodies over with Oil; then they conducted them to the Source of the River, and there they made them drink of two sorts of Water; those of Lethe, which effaced out of their Minds all the prophane Thoughts which before posses’d them; and those of Mnemosyne, which had the Virtue to make them remember whatsoever they should see in the sacred Den. After all these Preparatives, they were show’d the Statue of Trophonius, to which they made their Prayers; and then they were covered with Linnen Vests, which were girt about them with certain sacred Band-lets, and so at last they were admitted to the Oracle.

The Oracle stood upon a Mountain, and was encompassed with a Wall of white Stones, upon which Obelisks of Brass were erected: Within this Circle was a Cavern of the Figure of an Oven, cut out by Art, whose Entrance was so strait, that Men did not descend into it by Stairs but by little Ladders, and when they were come to the Bottom, they found another little Cavern, whose Entrance was yet strainer: Here they laid themselves down upon the Earth, and took into each Hand certain Compositions
of Honey which they were obliged to carry, and then they put their Feet within the opening of the little Cavern, and immediately they perceived themselves pulled into it with much force and suddenness.

Then it was that things to come were declared to 'em; but not to all in the same manner; for some heard and did not see, and those that saw where not to hear. After this they came out of the Den, creeping upon the Earth, as they entered in, with their Feet foremost; immediately they were put into the Chair of Mnemosyne, where they were asked what they had seen or heard; thence they were led into the Chapel of the good Genius, being still quite amaz'd and out of their Wits; but retrieving their Senses by little and little, they began to be able to Laugh; for till then the Grandeur of the Mysteries, and the Divinity with which they were filled, had prevented it; though for my part I think one may well wonder how they could refrain so long.

Pausanias tells us that there was one Man who enter'd into the Den of Trophonius and never came out again: This was a certain Spy that Demetrius sent thither, to see if there were anything in that Holy Place, worth the plundering. The Body of this unhappy Man was afterwards found a far off from thence; for 'tis to be suppos'd that he was cast out of the sacred Den by some more secret way than he enter'd into it.

It is very easy for us to make Reflections upon all this; for what leisure and opportunity could the Priests want during all the Sacrifices which
which they obliged Men to make, to qualify them for the entrance into this sacred Den? For certainly Trophonius knew how to choose his Men, and would not receive every Body. How did all these Washings, Expiations, and Night-watchings, and these Passages into their strait and obscure Caverns, fill Mens Minds with Superstition, Dread and Fear? How many Machines were at work in those dark places? The History of the Spy of Demetrius assures us, that there was no Security in the Den, for those who came thither with malicious Intentions; and that besides the sacred Passage into it, which was known to all the World, the Den had another secret one, which was known only to the Priests. When Men were drawn in by their Feet, it was doubtless done by Cords, (tho' not perceiv'd;) for they could not put their Hands to feel what it was that drew 'em, because they were embarras'd with those Compositions of Honey, which they were oblig'd not to let go. And perhaps those Caverns were full of Perfumes and Odour which stupefied the Brain: And the Waters of Lethes and Mnemosyne were, also ('tis probably) prepar'd for the same effect. To say nothing of the frightful Sights and the Noises which they might be terrified withal; and when they came out from thence little better than distracted, they talk'd strangely of what they had seen or heard; so that People taking advantage of their Disorder, might collect what they pleas'd, and change it as they thought fitting, and in fine, interpret it as they liked themselves.
Add to all this, that there were some of those *Oracles* which were delivered in Dreams, where one must prepare one's self by fasting, as that of *Amphiaraus* in *Attica*; and then if your Dream could not receive a clear Interpretation, they made you sleep again in the Temple, (at fresh Charges) and never fail'd to fill your Head with Fancies fit to make you Dream of Gods and extraordinary things: And for the most part, you were to sleep upon the Skins of Victims, which perhaps were rubb'd with a Drug which had some odd effect on the Brain.

But when it was the Priests who sleeping upon the sealed Letters, had themselves the Prophetick Dreams, you may easily imagine, that those Dreams were not very difficult to unfold.

Indeed the Care, that the Pagan Priests took to hide their Impostures, seems to have been greater than it needed to have been; for if People were credulous and stupid enough to content themselves with the Dreams of the Priests, and to give credit to them, then there was no necessity, to suffer them to dream in the Temples: And the Priest might have reserved this Privilege to themselves alone, without any Contradiction. For considering what sort of People they were, whom they had to do withal, it was too much Honour for them, to be cheated with Precaution and Address.

There was in *Achaia* an *Oracle* of Mercury, which was delivered in this manner: After many Ceremo-
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nies, they whispered the God in the Ear, and asked him what Question they pleas'd, and afterwards they stopt their own Ears with their Hands, and the first Words which they heard after they were come out of the Temple, was taken to be the Answer of the God. And to the end that the Priests might more easily cause them to hear what they pleas'd, and the imposture not be discover'd, this Oracle was always to be consulted in the Night.

C H A P. XVI.

Of the Ambiguity of Oracles.

One of the greatest Secrets of the Oracles, and one of the things which most of all assures us that they were managed by Men, is their Ambiguity, and the Art that was used to contrive such Answers as would be suitable to any Event that was likely to happen.

* When Alexander fell sick all of a sudden at Babylon, some of the Principal of his Court went to pass a Night in the Temple of Serapis, to inquire of that God, if it were not fit for 'em to bring their King thither to be cured by him. The God answer'd, that it was better for him to remain where he was. Serapis had reason; for if he had advised the bringing Alexander thither, and he had died by the way, or in the Temple itself, what would they not have said? But if the King continued at Babylon and recover'd.

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ver'd his Health there, what a mighty Glory would it have brought the Oracle? And if he died, it might be said to be the best that could befall him after the Conquests that he had made, which if he lived, he could neither augment nor preserve. And without doubt this last Interpretation was made for the Honour of Serapis, after Alexander was Dead.

Macrobius says, that when Trajan had a Design of Attacking the Parthians, he was desired to consult the Oracle of the City Heliopolis about it, whither the manner was only to send a sealed Letter. Now, tho' Trajan put no great Confidence in Oracles, yet he sent a sealed Letter thither, in which there was nothing written, and they sent him back a suitable Answer, that is, none at all. So that Trajan being now convinced of the Divinity of Oracles, sends another sealed Letter, in which he demands of the God, Whether he should finish the War, that he had undertaken, and return to Rome, or not? The God ordered, that they should take a Vine, which was one of the Offerings of the Temple, and cut it in pieces, and so carry it to Trajan. The Event, says Macrobius, was conformable to the Oracle; for Trajan dying in this War, his Bones, which were represented by the broken Vine, were carried to Rome.

All the World knew for certain that the Emperor designed to make War with the Parthians, and that this was the Business about which he consulted the Oracle: And, the Oracle was so cunning, as to return him an Allegorical Answer, and so general an one, that it could not
not fail of being true: For if Trajan had returned to Rome, either Victorious, but hurt, or having lost some part of his Soldiers; or if he were Overcome, and his Army put to Flight; or if any Division had been amongst his Men; or if any Mutiny had happened amongst the Parthians; or if any had happened at Rome in the Absence of the Emperor; if the Parthians had been wholly conquered; or if they had been but partly worsted, or that they had been abandoned by some of their Allies, in any one of these cases, this broken Vine miraculously had foretold all: And there was no question, but some one of these would happen. And I believe the Bones of the Emperor that were carried to Rome, and by which they explained the Oracle, were, for all that, the only thing of which the Oracle never thought.

This Vine puts me in Mind of a kind of Oracle that accommodated itself to every thing, of which, as Apuleius tells us, the Priests of the Goddess of Syria were the Inventors. They made two Verses, the Sense whereof was this:

Two Oxen yoked together cut the Earth,
And make the Fields produce a fruitful Birth.

Now there was no Question, which they could not Answer with these two Verses. For if they were consulted upon a Marriage, it was the same thing, Oxen yoked together, and a fruitful Birth. If they were consulted about the Purchase of any Land, again, it was, Yoked Oxen, and fruitful Fields. If about a Journey; the Oxen yoked together, and so ready to go forth, and
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and the fruitful Fields promised a great Profit or Success by the Journey. If one went to War, these Oxen under the Yoke, do clearly signify, that you shall put your Enemies under the Yoke. Certainly, this Goddess of Syria did not love much Tatling, and had found out the true Secret to satisfy all Questions with one single Answer.

Those, who received these ambiguous Oracles, took the pains very willingly to justify them, by adjusting the Success and Prediction together. And oftentimes, that which had but one Sense (in the Intention of those who delivered the Oracle,) was, after the Event, found to have two. For the Impostors might be secure, that their Honour would be preferred with all the Care imaginable by those very Persons whom they abused. Thus, when the false Prophet Alexander was asked by Rutilianus, what Masters he should provide for his Son; he answered, that he should let him have Pythagoras, and Homer. Rutilianus took it in the plain Sense, that he should study Philosophy and Humanity. But the young Man dying within a few Days after, they represented to Rutilianus, that the Prophet was very much mistaken: But Rutilianus found out (with a very great deal of Subtilty) that the Death of his Son was foretold by the Oracle, because it appointed Pythagoras and Homer, two dead Men, for his Tutors.
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CHAP. XVII.

The Cheats of the Oracles manifestly discovered.

But there is now no need of being any further solicitous to detect the Cunning of the Priests, by Subtleties spun almost as finely as their own; for they were fully and clearly discovered to the Eyes of the whole World, when the true Religion triumphed entirely over Paganism, under the Christian Emperors.

Theodoret says, that Theophilus Bishop of Alexandria, shewed the Inhabitants of that Town, the hollow Statues, into which the Priests privately crept to deliver their Oracles.

When by the Order of Constantine the Temple of Aesculapius in Cilicia, was pluck'd down, they chased thence, (says Euseb. in the Life of this Emperor,) not a God, nor a Daemon, but the Cheat, that had so long deluded the People. He adds, that in general, in the demolished Idols, they found no Gods at all, nor Demons, nor so much as a melancholy Shade or obscure Specter; but only some Hay, Straw, or Ordurues, or the Bones of dead Men. It is from him, that we learn the History of Theotechnus, who set up in the City of Antioch, the Statue of Jupiter, God of Friendship; which questionless was contrived to deliver Oracles, since Euseb. says, that they were Prophets belonging to this God. Theotechnus, upon this Account got so great Credit, that Maximin made him Governour of all
all the Province. But Licinius coming to Antioch, and suspecting the Imposture, caused the Priests and Prophets of this new Jupiter, to be tortured with the Rack; hereupon they confessed all, and both they and their Accomplices were put to a cruel Death, their Master Theotechnus suffering first. The same Eusebius, in the fourth Book of his Evangelical Preparations, says, that in his time, the most famous Prophets amongst the Pagans, and their most celebrated Divines, of whom some were Magistrates of their Cities, were compelled by Torments to discover the very Particulars of all the Cheats of the Oracles. If we were now to make out what the old Christians believed of them, all these Passages of Eusebius, in my Opinion, would decide the Question. They admitted Damons indeed in a certain general System, which served for their Disputes; but when they came to particular matters of Fact, they spoke little of them, or rather directly denied them.

I cannot believe, that we need any better Witnesses against the Damons, than the Pagan Priests themselves, by whose Confessions, the thing seems to me to be clearly made out. I will only therefore add one Chapter about their Lots, not to discover the Imposture of them, for that is comprehended in what we have already said of Oracles in general; and besides it will be sufficiently apparent of itself; but that I may not omit a Species of Oracles very famous in Antiquity.

CHAP.
C H A P. XVIII.

Of Lots.

Lots are the Effects of Chance, and, as it were, the Oracles of Fortune, by which she decides all things: and they are the Instruments we make use of, to know what this Decision is.

These Lots for the most part were a kind of Dice, whereon were ingraven certain Characters, or Words, the Explication of which was to be fought for, in Tables made for that purpose. The manner of using these Lots was various: In some Temples they cast them out of their Hands, in others they threw them out of an Urn; from whence comes this Proverb so common with the Greeks, The Lot is cast.

The Game of Chance was always ushered in by Sacrifices, and abundance of Ceremonies. The Priest, as 'tis probable, knew how to manage the Dice; but if they would not take that pains, they might e'en let 'em run as they would, since they were always Masters of the Explanation.

* The Lacedæmonians went one Day to consult the Lots of Dodona, upon a War that they were undertaking; for besides the Speaking Oake, the Doves, the Bafons, and the Oracles, there were also Lots of Dodona. After the Ceremonies were past, just as they were going to cast the Lots, with a great deal of Respect and Veneration,
eration, a Monkey of the King of Molossi, being got into the Temple, threw down the Lots and the Urn: upon this the frightened Priests told the Lacedæmonians that they ought not to think of conquering, but only how to save themselves. And all the Writers assure us, that the Lacedæmonians never received a more unlucky Presage.

The most famous Lots of all, were those of Praeneste and Antium, two little Towns in Italy: At Antium, there were wonderful Statues that moved of themselves; (according to the Testimony of Macrobius, Book i. Chap. 23.) whose different Motions, either served for Answers, or declared whether it was fitting to consult the Lots, or not.

And there is a Passage in Cicero's Second Book of Divination, which tells us, that they consulted the Lots of Praeneste, with the Consent of Fortune; which implies that the Statue of Fortune could nod with its Head, or give some other Signs of its Will and Pleasure.

We find also, that there were other Statues, which had this very same Faculty: Diodorus Siculus and Quintus Curtius say, that Jupiter Hammon was carried by fourscore Priests, in a kind of golden Chair of State, covered with a rich Canopy, from which hung abundance of silver Cups that made a jangling Noise, and that he was followed by a great Number of Women and Maids, who sung Hymns in the Language of their Country; And that this God, by some Motions or Signs that he made, instructed the Priests that carried him, which way he would have them go.

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The God of Heliopolis in Syria, according to Macrobius, did as much: All the Difference was, that he would be carried by Men of the best Quality in the Province, and such as had a long time liv'd in perfect Continence, and had their Heads shaved.

Lucian, in his Treatise of the Goddess of Syria says, that he once saw a much more miraculous sort of Apollo, who, being carried on the shoulders of his Priests, took a fancy to leave them in the lurch below on the Earth, and to take a Walk by himself in the Skies. And that all this should be done in the sight of such a kind of Man as Lucian, is no small Wonder.

But I am so tired with discovering the Cheats of these Pagan Priests, (and am persuaded, my Reader is as weary of it as I am myself) that I will not spend any time in considering how it was, that they made their Puppets dance, and play’d all their juggling Tricks.

In the East, the Lots were Arrows, and to this Day the Turks and Arabians make use of them in the same manner. The Prophet Ezechiel says, that Nebucadonosor mingled his Arrows against Ammon and Hierusalem, and the Predicting Arrow flew towards Hierusalem; which decided the Question, against which People he should make War.

In Greece and Italy, they often drew the Lot from some famous Poet, as Homer or Euripides; And what first represented it self at the opening of the Book, was looked upon to be the Decree of Heaven. And History furnishes us with a thousand Examples of this kind.

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'Tis evident, that about two hundred Years after the Death of Virgil, they set a great Value on his Verses, and began to believe them Prophetick, and to use them instead of the ancient Lots of Praneste. * Alexander Lampri-dius. Severus, in particular, (at a time, when Heliogabalus was not much his Friend) received this Answer in the Temple of Praneste out of Virgil,

\[\text{Si qua fata aspera rumpas,}\\ \text{Tu Marcellus eris.}\]

If you can vanquish Destiny, The Great Marcellus you shall be.

Here my Author remembers, that Rabelais mentions the Virgilian Lot, which Panurge consulted concerning his Marriage: And he judges that Place of the Book, as learned, as 'tis agreeable and full of fancy; he says, that the Whimsies and Follies of Rabelais are many times more to be esteemed, than the most serious Discourses of others. I would not forget this Elogy, because 'tis a thing very singular to meet with, in the midst of a Treatise of Oracles that is full of Knowledge and Erudition. 'Tis certain that Rabelais had a great deal of Wit and Reading, and a particular Art of Writing of Learned Things in a frolick and jesting Way, and of relating a thousand ridiculous and fantastical Stories, without being tiresome to his Reader. And 'tis a Misfortune that he liv'd not in an Age that would have oblig'd him to a Style more Gentleman-like and Inoffensive.
These Lots were afterwards in use among Christians; who consulted the Holy Scriptures for that purpose, as the Pagans did their Poets. St. Augustin, in his 119th Epistle to Januarius, appears not wholly to disapprove it, unless it be done for some wicked or vain end. Gregory of Tours tells us himself what his Practice was: He pass’d seven days in Fasting and Pray’er, afterwards he went to the Tomb of St. Martin, where he opened some Book of the Scripture as his Fancy led him, and took for the Answer of God, the first Passage which offer’d its self to his view; and if this Passage made nothing for his Purpose, then he opened the Bible in another place.

Others took the first thing they heard sung when they enter’d into the Church, for a Divine Preface.

But who would believe that the Emperor * Heraclius, deliberating in what place he should Winter his Army, should determine it by this kind of Lot? He purify’d his Army during three Days, and afterwards open’d the Book of the Evangelists, and there found that Albany was mark’d out for his Winter-quarters. Was that an Affair of which a Man could reasonably hope for a decision in the Scriptures?

At last indeed the Church has quite banish’d this Superstition, but it took up a great deal of time first: For when once our Minds are posses’d with an Error, ’tis a wonder if ever we will be undeceiv’d.

The End of the First Discourse.
The Second Discourse,

That Oracles did not cease at the coming of Jesus Christ.

The greatest Difficulty that regards Oracles is now surmounted, since we have proved, that Demons were not at all concerned in them. And if this be true, then Oracles signify so little to the Christian Religion, that there will be no necessity to maintain, that they ceased precisely at the coming of Jesus Christ.
CHAP. I.

The Weakness of those Reasons upon which the Opinion, that Oracles ceased at the coming of Jesus Christ, is founded.

That which made most Men believe that Oracles ceased at the coming of Jesus Christ, was the Prediction of Oracles themselves, which foretold their own Silence, and the Confession of the Heathens that lived about the time of Jesus Christ, who often speak of their Cessation.

We have already shewn the Falsity of these pretended Oracles, in which a Daemon that was struck dumb, said himself that he was struck dumb; but these Demons were either feign'd by the over-great Zeal of the Christians, or too easily receiv'd by their Credulity.

I will recite one of those Oracles upon which Eusebius supports his Opinion, that they did cease at the Birth of Jesus Christ. 'Tis taken from Porphyry; and Eusebius never fails of making all the advantage he can of the Testimony of this Enemy.

I will declare to you the truth concerning the Oracles of Delphos and Claros, (said Apollo to his Priests) In times past there came from the Bosom of the Earth an Infinity of Oracles and Fountains, and Exhalations, which inspir'd People with Divine Furies; which the Earth, by the continual...
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Changes which time makes in it, has reimbibed and caus'd to enter into its self, all those Fountains, Exhalations and Oracles: and there remains now no more but the Waters of Mycale in the Didymean Fields, and the Oracles of Claros and Parnassus.

Upon this, Eusebius concludes in general, that all Oracles were then come to an end.

But 'tis certain that three of 'em at least are to be excepted, according to this Oracle which he reports himself: But he takes notice only of those words that make for his purpose, and troubles not himself with the rest.

But besides, does this Oracle of Porphyrius tell us, when the other Oracles ceas'd? not at all; tho' Eusebius will by all means have it understood to be at the time of the coming of Jesus Christ. We may commend his Zeal, but his manner of Arguing does not at all deserve our Praise.

Nay suppose that Porphyrius's Oracle did speak of the coming of Jesus Christ, would it follow therefore that all Oracles then ceas'd, and that none remain'd? Eusebius perhaps imagin'd that this Exception signified little, and that it is sufficient if the greatest part of the Oracles did then cease; but he is mistaken, for if Oracles had been deliver'd by Damons, who by the Birth of Jesus Christ were condemn'd to eternal silence, then no Damion would have been excepted, or privileged. So that if there was but one Damion remaining after the Birth of Jesus Christ, it would be sufficient to prove that it was not His Birth that imposed a perpetual silence upon Oracles. This is one of those
those Cases, where the least Exception ruins the general Proposition.

But you may say perhaps, that Demons at the Birth of Jesus Christ did cease to deliver Oracles; but that yet Oracles continued still for all that, because the Priests counterfeited them.

This Supposition is without any foundation; for I can prove that Oracles continued four hundred Years after the Death of Christ, and there is no mention any where made of the least difference observ'd between those that were delivered after the Birth of Jesus, and those that were pronounced before it. And besides, if the Priests could so dextrously put the cheat upon People during the space of four hundred Years, why could they not continue to do it longer?

Of all the Pagan Authors that are in request with those who would make us believe that Oracles ceas'd at the coming of Jesus Christ, Plutarch is the chief: He lived some hundreds of Years after Christ, and has written a Dialogue concerning the Cessation of Oracles. Many Men upon his Authority only, have taken up their Opinions, and espoused their Party; and yet Plutarch positively excepts the Oracle of Libadim, (that is to say, of Trophonius) and of Delphos; where, as he says, anciently there was Imployment enough for two Priests, and sometimes for three, but in his Days one served the turn.

Besides, he confesses, that the Oracles were fallen to decay in Boeotia, a Country, which had formerly been famous for producing a great number of them.
All this, 'tis true, proves the Ceſſation of some Oracles, and the Diminution of the Credit of others; but not the intire Ceſſation of all, which however there is an absolute necessity for those to prove, who maintain the common Opinion.

The Oracle of Delphos was not fo mightily decay'd in Plutarch's time; for he himself tells us in another Treatife, that the Temple of Delphos was then far more magnificent than ever it had been; that they had repaired the ancient Buildings which Time began to ruin, and that they had added others to it, which were altogether after the modern Mode; that there was a small Town near Delphos, which increas'd daily by little and little, and had its Nourishment from the old City, like a little Tree that springs from the Foot of a great one; and that this little Town was become more considerable than it had been for a thousand Years past. But even in this Dialogue, which treats of the Ceſſation of Oracles, Demetrius the Cicilian, one of the Interlocutors, says, that before he began his Voyage, the Oracles of Amphiloſhus and Mopsus were as flourithing as ever; but that since he came from thence he knew not how things stood with 'em. You see then what is to be found in favour of the Ceſſation of Oracles at the coming of Christ in this Treatife of Plutarch, to which a multitude of learned Men referr you for the Proof of it.

Here my Author pretends, that we are also fallen into a gross Miftake, concerning a Passage in the second Book of Divinations; Where
Cicero laughs at the Oracle, that was delivered by Apollo in Latin to Pyrrhus, who consulted him concerning the War he was going to make against the Romans. This Oracle had a double Meaning, so that it could not be understood, whether Pyrrhus should overcome the Romans, or the Romans overcome Pyrrhus. The Equivocation is so peculiar to the Latin Phrase, that one cannot well render it into English; for my part, I cannot translate it better than thus:

_I do pronounce, that Rome Pyrrhus shall overcome._

But the Words of Cicero, concerning this Oracle, are these that follow:

_In the first place, (says he) Apollo never spoke Latin. In the second place, The Greeks knew nothing of this Oracle. Thirdly, Apollo in the time of Pyrrhus had left off Rhiming. In fine, Altho' the Æacides (from which Family Pyrrhus was descended) were far from being Men of a fine Judgment, or of a piercing Wit, yet the Equivocation of the Oracle was so manifest, that Pyrrhus could not chuse but perceive it. But why is it so long since any Oracles were delivered in this kind at Delphos? For this Reason it is, that now-a-days nothing is more defis'd than they are._

It is on these last Words, that the Opinion is grounded, that Oracles were not delivered at Delphos in the time of Cicero.

But my Author says, that they are deceived, who think so, and that these Words, Why are there no more Oracles delivered in this kind at Del-

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phos? plainly shew, that Cicero speaks only of Oracles in Verse; since he is discoursing in that place, about one wrapp'd up in an Hexameter.

But I know not whether we ought to be altogether of my Author's Opinion; for observe how Cicero goes on: When the Defenders of Oracles are hard put to it, they answer, That this Vertue in the Exhalation of the Earth, which inspired the Pythian Priestess, is evaporated with length of time. One would think, that they were talking of some Wine that was grown flat, and that had lost its Spirits; for what time can consume or dry up a Vertue all Divine? And what can be more Divine than an Exhalation from the Earth, which works such an Effect upon the Soul, as to give it both the Knowledge of Futurity, and the Power to Express it self in Verse.

It seems to me, that Cicero means, that the whole Vertue was intirely lost: Whereas he he would have acknowledged, that a good part of it had remained, if Oracles were still delivered at Delphos, tho' but in Prose. For no Man will say, that a Prophecy is nothing at all, unless it be in Verse?

I do not think, that they are so mightily mistaken, who take this Passsage for an absolute Proof of the entire Cessation of Oracles at Delphos; but they do ill, who pretend to draw any Argument from thence, for attributing this Cessation to the Birth of Jesus Christ. For the Oracle ceased too soon for that, since it appears by this very Passage, that it ceased a long time before Cicero.
But for all this, the thing was not in truth as Cicero seems to understand it in this place; for he himself, in his first Book of Divinations, makes his Brother Quintus, who stands up for Oracles, to speak in this manner: I rely upon this Point, that the Oracle of Delphos had never been so famous, and had never received so many Offerings from Kings and all sorts of People, if the Truth of its Predictions had not been acknowledged. Now indeed it is not so famous, because its Predictions are less true: And so, on the other side, if they had not been once extremely true, it would never have been so mighty famous heretofore as it was. But (which is yet a stronger Proof) Cicero himself (as Plutarch relates in his Life) did in his Youth consult the Oracle of Delphos, concerning the Conduct he ought to keep in the World: And 'twas answered him, That he should follow his Genius, rather than conform himself to the Opinion of the Vulgar. Now if it were not true, that Cicero consulted the Oracle of Delphos, yet, at least, this Story obliges us to grant, that in the time of Cicero, it was consulted.
Why the ancient Authors contradicted each other, very often, about the time of the Cessation of Oracles.

Perhaps it may be objected, How comes it to pass then, that in the fifth Book of Lucan's Pharsalia, we find this Account of the Oracle of Delphos? The Oracle of Delphos, which has been silent ever since great Men were afraid of what was to come to pass, and forbid that the Gods should declare it, is the most considerable of all those Favours of Heaven, which our Age has lost.

And a little after, Appius, who was desirous to know the Destiny of Italy, had the Boldness, to go and interrogate this Cavern, that had been mute so long; and to move the tripod, that had been so long undisturbed. And that Juvenal says in a certain place, Sense the Oracles speak no more at Delphos——

In fine, Whence comes it, that among the Authors of the same Age, we find some, who say, the Oracle of Delphos speaks no more; and others that say, he speaks still? And whence comes it, that the same Author sometimes contradicts himself so often upon this Subject?

The Reason most certainly is, because Oracles were neither in their ancient Reputation, nor yet were they absolutely ruined: So that one may well say, that, in comparison of what they
they had formerly been, they were nothing; but yet, for all that, they continued to be something still.

Besides, some Oracles were ruined for a certain time, and afterwards came into credit again; for Oracles were subject to several Adventures and Misfortunes: And we ought not to believe them annihilated from the time of their being mute; for they might afterwards assume a Voice again and speak.

Plutarch says, that in old time a Dragon came and lodg’d upon Parnassus, and caus’d the Delphick Oracle to be deserted, and that it was commonly believ’d, that Solitude invited the Dragon to that place; but that ’twas more probable, that he caus’d the Solitude, Greece being fill’d with Cities, &c.

You see that Plutarch speaks of a time very far distant back. So the Oracle had since its erection been once abandon’d already, and we are sure, that afterwards it was very well re-establish’d. But, after this, the Temple of Delphos underwent divers Misfortunes: It was plundered by a Thief descended from Phlegyas, by the Army of Xerxes, by the Phocæses, by Pyrrhus, by Nero; and last of all, by the Christians under Constantine. All this did no great good to the Oracle, for the Priests were either massacred, or dispers’d, the Place was abandon’d, the Sacred Utensils were lost, and it must of necessity require great Charges, Care, and Time, to rig out these Oracles again fit for Holy Use.

All this then may be possible, that Cicero in his Youth consulted the Oracle of Delphos, that during
during the War between Cæsar and Pompey, and in that general Disorder of the Universe, the Oracle was mute, as Lucan will have it; and that after the end of this War, when Cicerō writ his Book of Philosophy, it might begin to be re-establish'd so much, as to make Quintus say it was still in the World; and yet so little, that Cicerō might suppose that it was not in being.

When Dorimachus, as Polibius reports, had burnt the Portico of the Temple of Dodona, had quite destroy'd the Sacred Place of the Oracle, and had pillag'd or ruin'd all the Offerings, an Author of that time might very well say, that the Oracle of Dodona spokē no more. But for all this, in the following Age, another Author might be found transmitting to Posterity some of the Answers which it gave in his time.

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CHAP. III.

The History of the Duration of the Oracle of Delphos, and some ancient Oracles.

We cannot better prove, that about the time of Jesus Christ, to which the Silence of the Delphick Oracle is so usually refer'd, it did not altogether cease, but was only interrupted, than by setting down all the different Occasions that we find it took of speaking since.
Suetonius in the Life of Nero says, that he, consulting the Oracle of Delphos, was warn'd to have a care of seventy three Years; and that thereupon Nero believ'd, he should not die till that Age, and never thought of old Galba, who being seventy three Years old took his Empire from him: For he was so conceited of his long Life and good Fortune, that having lost in a Ship-wrack things of a very great value, he bragg'd that the Fishes would bring 'em back to him again.

But certainly Nero either receiv'd from the Oracle of Delphos some other Answer that seem'd less favourable to him, or was discontented that he was destin'd to live no longer than seventy three Years, or else he would never have took from the Priests of Delphos the Cirebaan Fields, to give them to his Soldiers. He also took from the Temple more than five hundred Statues, some of Men, and, some of Gods, but all of Brass; and to prophane or for ever abolish the Oracle, he caus'd severall Mens Throats to be cut at the very Mouth of the Sacred Cavern, where the Divine exhalation issued forth.

That the Oracle after such an Adventure as this, should be mute till the Reign of Domitian, and, as Juvenal says, should speak no more, is not at all to be wonder'd at.

And yet 'tis impossible it could be altogether mute from the time of Nero to that of Domitian; for observe what Philostratus says in the Life of Apollonius Tyanaus, who came to the Court of Domitian: Apollonius visitid all the Oracles of Greece, that of Dodona, that of Del-
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Delphos, and that of Amphiaraus. And in another place he speaks yet farther: *You may see Apollo of Delphos made illustrious by the Oracles which he delivers in the midst of Greece; he answers those who consult him, as you know very well your self, in very few words, and without accompanying his Answers with Prodigies; altho' it were very easy for him to make Parnassus tremble, to stop the Course of Cephisus, and to change the Waters of Castalia into Wine; but he tells the truth plainly, and does not amuse himself to make an unprofitable show of his Power.* 'Tis very pleasant that Philostratus should expect to have the greater Value set upon this Apollo, because he was no great Worker of Miracles. But I think there lurks in this place some secret Poison against the Christians.

We formerly acquainted you, that in the time of Plutarch, who lived under Trajan, this Oracle was yet in being, but reduc'd to one single Priestess, tho' in elder times it had two or three. Under Adrian, Dion Chrysostom says, that he consulted the Oracle of Delphos, and relates one of its Answers, which seem'd to him to be very intricate, and which was so indeed.

Under the Antonini, Lucian says, that a Priest of Tyana, went to demand of the false Prophet Alexander, if the Oracles that were deliver'd then at Didymi, at Claros, and at Delphos, were indeed the Answers of Apollo, or Impostures. Alexander, who had a regard for these Oracles, which were so like his own, answered the Priest, that it was a Secret not fit for him to know. But when this wise Priest demanded what he should be after his Death, he was answered, boldly,
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boldly, Thou shalt be a Camel, then a Horse, then a Philosopher, and at last a Prophet as great as Alexander.

After the Antonini, three Emperors disputed the Empire, Severus Septimus, Pescennius Niger, and Clodius Albinus. Delphos was consulted, says Spartanus, to know which would be best for the Commonwealth; and the Oracle answered in Verse, The Black is the best, the African is good, but the White is the worst of all. By the Black was meant Pescennius Niger; by the African, Severus Septimus, who was of Africa; and by the White, Clodius Albinus. It was ask'd afterwards, Who should remain Master of the Empire; and it was answer'd, The Blood of the White and the Black shall be spilt, and the African shall govern the World. Then it was demanded, How long time he should govern? and it was answered, He shall ride on the Sea of Italy with twenty Ships, though with one Ship he may cross the Sea. By which it is meant that Severus should reign twenty Years. Here the Oracle reserv'd to itself an obscure Meaning, to have recourse to in time of need. But yet in the times when Delphos was most flourishing, there were never better or more substantial Oracles than these.

We find nevertheless, that Clemens Alexandrinus, in his Exhortations to the Gentiles, which he composed, either under Severus, or about that time, says very plainly, that the Fountain of Castalia, which belonged to the Oracle of Delphos, and that of Colophon and all the other Prophetick Fountains, had at last, tho' it were late first, lost their fabulous Vertues.
Perhaps in that time, these Oracles were fallen into one of those Silences, to which they were so subject by Intervals: Or perhaps, because they were no more in Reputation, Clemens Alexandrinus thought fit to say, they were totally silenced.

'Tis certain, that under Constantius, the Father of Constantine, and during the Youth of Constantine, Delphos was not yet ruined; since Eusebius writes in the Life of Constantine, that he said that there was then a Report, that Apollo had delivered an Oracle, not by the Mouth of a Priestess, but from the bottom of the obscure Cavern, which said--- That the Just Men, who were upon Earth, were the cause that he could not speak truth. A very pleasant Reason this! Besides, the Oracle of Delphos must then necessarily be in a very miserable condition, since it could not maintain one Priestess.

But this Oracle received a terrible Blow under Constantine, who commanded, or suffered, that Delphos should be pillaged. Then, says Eusebius in the Life of Constantine, they produced in the open View of all the People, in the Publick Places of Constantinople, those Statues which the Errors of Men had caused to be so long time the Object of Veneration and Worship; here Apollo Pythius, there Sminthus: The Tripodes were exposed in the Circus, and the Heliconian Muse in the Palace, to the Railleries of all the World.

But after all this, the Oracle of Delphos came into credit once again; for the Emperor * Julian sent to enquire of it, about the Expedition, that he was designing against the Persians. If the Oracle of Delphos did con-
continue any longer, we cannot however extend its History farther; for there is no more spoken of it in any Author. But in all likelihood, that was the very time, when it became silent, and its last Words were addressed to the Emperor Julian, who was so zealous for Paganism. I cannot therefore well understand, how some great Men could put Augustus in the place of Julian, and boldly affirm, that the Oracle of Delphos ended with the Answer it delivered to Augustus, concerning the Hebrew Infant. Some modern Authors, who thought Oracles worthy of a glorious End, since they made so great a Noise in the World, have contrived one very fit, to give them a Reputation. They found in Sozomenus and Theodoretus, that in the time of Julian, the Temple of Apollo, which was in the Suburbs of Antioch, called Daphne, was set on fire, no Body being able to discover the Author, or Cause of it; but the Pagans accused the Christians of this Conflagration, and the Christians attributed it to Thunder and Lightning thrown by the Hand of God. Theodoretus indeed says, That the Lightning fell upon this Temple, but Sozomenus says nothing at all of it. Now these modern Authors had a mind to transplant this Accident to the Temple of Delphos, which was indeed far distant from thence. And so they write, that by the just Vengeance of God, it was destroyed by Lightning, accompanied with a mighty Earth-quake. But there is no mention made of this great Trembling of the Earth, neither by Sozomenus, nor Theodoret, in their
Their relation of the fire of Daphne; though others added it, to keep the Thunder company, and to heighten the prodigiouslyness of the accident.

But it would be a very troublesome thing, to give you a history of the duration of all the oracles, after the birth of Jesus Christ. It is sufficient to consider in what time we find, that some of the principal ones spoke their last. But you must always remember, that it is not understood, that this was the very last time they spoke, but that it was the last occasion authors had to tell us that they spoke.

Dion, who did not finish his history, till the eighth year of Alexander Severus, that is, in the 230th year of Jesus Christ, says, that in his time Amphiochus delivered oracles in dreams: He tells us also, that there was in the city of Apollonia an oracle, where things to come were foretold, by observing the manner how the fire took hold of the incense, that was cast upon the altar. But it was not permitted to ask this oracle any questions concerning death or marriage. These peevish restrictions were sometimes founded upon the particular history of the God, who in his lifetime perhaps had an occasion given him of taking an aversion to certain things: Though I am also of opinion, that they might sometimes come from the ill success, which those answers had, that were delivered by the oracle, concerning some particular matters.

* Zosimus. * Under Aurelius, towards the year of Christ 272, the palmyrenians being revolted, consulted the oracle of Apollo
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Apollo Sarpedonius in Cilicia. They consulted likewise that of Venus of Apachra; the Form of which was so very singular, that it deserves to be mentioned here. Apachra, is a Place between Heliopolis and Biblus. Near the Temple of Venus is a Lake like a Cistern: And at certain Assemblies, that are held there at some particular Seasons, there is to be seen a Fire in the Form of a Globe of Lamps: And this Fire, says Zosimus, has continued to be seen even in our Days, that is to say, about the 400 Year of Jesus Christ. Those that offer, throw into the Lake the Present designed for the Goddess, of what sort forever they be; If she receives them, they sink to the bottom; if she receives them not, they swim on the Surface of the Water, though they be of Silver or Gold. In the Year before the Ruin of the Palmyrenians, their Presents sunk to the bottom, but the Year following every thing swam on the top.

* Licinius, having a Design to renew his War with Constantine, consulted the Oracle of Apollo Didymaus, and had for Answer two Verses of Homer, of which this is the Sense: Unhappy old Man! It is not for thee to fight against young Men; thou hast not Strength enough left, for old Age pulls thee down.

* A God, of no great Reputation, named Besas, delivered Oracles in Answer to Letters at Abydum, a Town in the Confines of Thebais, under the Empire of Constantius. For there were sent to this Emperor certain Letters, which had been left upon the Altar, in the Temple of Besas; upon which he began to make a very }
rigorous Prosecution against those who had laid those Letters there; and cast into Prison, or sent to Banishment a great number of Persons, or else caused them to be cruelly torment- ed: Because by these Letters, they enquired after the Fate of the Empire, or concerning the Duration of the Reign of Constantius, or the Success of some Designs, which they were fram- ing against him.

In fine, Macrobius, who lived under Arcadi- us and Honorius, Sons of Theodosius, speaks of the God of Heliopolis in Syria, and of his Oracle, and of the Lots of Antium, in Terms which positively prove that they were all remaining in his time.

But here we must observe, that it is of no absolute Necessity to our Design, that all these Histories should be true, or that these Oracles did really deliver those very Answers which are attributed to 'em; for the very counterfeiting of Answers, implies that the Oracles were in being when those Answers were pretended to be delivered by them; and 'tis most plain by the Histories, which so many Authors have written of 'em, that they did not believe that they were wholly silenc'd in their Days.
That Oracles for the most part were abolisht at the same time with Heathenism.

Orcles for the most part ceas'd when Heathenism was abolisht, which was not immediately after the coming of Jesus Christ. For Constantine himself demolished but a few Temples, and he was fain to make the horrid Crimes that were perpetrated there, his Pretence for pulling 'em down. On this Pretext he plucked down the Temple of *Zosimus.

Venus Alphacitis, and that of †As-
culapius of Aega in Cicilia, in both of which there were Oracles. But yet he *prohibited Sacrificing to the Heathen Gods, and by that Edict began to make their Temples of no use. The Edicts of Constantius and of Julian (when Constantius had but newly declared him Cesar) are still extant, wherein on pain of Death they forbid all sorts of Divination, not only Astrology, Interpretation of Dreams and Magick, but also foretelling by the flights of Birds, and by the entrails of Beasts; which gave a mighty shock to the Religion of the Romans. And indeed the Emperours had a particular Interest in prohibiting all kinds of Fortune-telling, because one or other was always inquiring about their Destiny, and especially to know who was to be the next Successor, who usually, upon the flat-
tery of the Diviner, made a Revolt, and set up his own Claim to the Empire.

As there were many Oracles remaining, when Julian was proclaim'd Emperour, so he apply'd himself, as much as he could, to the Restauration of those that had been destroy'd. For Example, That of the Suburbs of Daphne was destroyed by Adrian, * who when he was a private Man, having dipt a Leaf in the Castalian Spring, (for there was one of this Name at Daphne as well as at Delphos,) found when he took it out of the Water, a Narrative of what was to befall him, and Advice to think of obtaining the Empire. And therefore when he was afterwards made Emperour, left the same Oracle should give the like Counsel to some Body else, he caus'd the sacred Spring to be choak'd up, by throwing a great quantity of Stones into it. There was a great deal of Ingratitude in this Procedure; but Julian * caus'd the Spring to be opened, the dead Bodies, which were buried near it, to be removed, and the place to be purified in the same manner as the Athenians had in former time purged the Island of Delos. But Julian went farther, and would needs be himself the Prophet of the Didymæan Oracle; for this he thought would be a means of bringing Prophecies into Credit again, which then lay under much Contempt. As he was Emperour he was (Pontifex Maximus, or) chiefest Priest; and tho' the Emperours had not been accustomed to make any great use of this Sacerdotal Dignity; yet he was resolved to make it more than an emp-
empty Title: And therefore we see, in one of those Letters of his, which are come to our view, in the Quality of Pontifex Maximus he suspends a Pagan Priest for three Years from the exercise of his Sacred Function. And the Letter, which he wrote to Arsaces, Pontifex of Galatia, acquaints us with the Way which he took to make Paganism flourish again: He congratulates in the first place his own Felicity, in that his Zeal had produced such great Effects in so short a time; and then he declares his Judgment to be, that the best means for the re-establishment of Heathenism, would be, to transplant the Virtues of Christianity into it, such as Charity towards Strangers, the Care of Burying the Dead decently, and that Sanctity of Life which the Christians, as he says, counterfeited so well. He therefore commands that Pontifex to oblige the Priests of Galatia, either by Arguments or Threats, to live regularly, to abstain from the publick Shows and Tipling-houses; to quit all fordid and infamous Employments, to addict themselves, with all their Family, only to the Service of the Gods, and to have a watchful Eye upon the Galileans, (so he scornfully calls the Christians,) and to suppress their Impieties and Profanations. He observes, that it is a great Shame, that whilst the Jews and Galileans maintain'd not only their own Poor, but such as were Heathens too, the Pagans should let their Poor starve, and not remember that Hospitality and Liberality are Virtues so peculiar and proper to them, that Homer brings in Eumæus speaking thus: My Guest, if a Man of Quali-
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...by much inferior to thine, had come hither, I must have entertain'd him; for all Men that are either Strangers or Poor come to us, as it were on an Errand from Jupiter; and tho' I have but little to give, yet I give that little with Cheerfulness. Last of all, he sets down what Distributions he appoints to be made each Year to the Poor of Galatia, and he bids the Pontifex take care that there be Hospitals built in each Town for the reception of Men of other Religions as well as Heathens. He thinks it not befitting the Dignity of the Pontifex to make frequent Visits to the Governors at their Houses, but that he rather write to 'em; nor will he have Priests go meet 'em, when they come to the Temples, the Priests may go to receive 'em as far as the Porch, but no farther. He also forbids the Governors on such an occasion to have their Guards marching before them, because they are then to be considered only as private Persons; but he gives the Soldiers leave to go in after them, if they will.

With this Care, and this Imitation of Christianity, it is probable that Julian (if he had lived) would have put some stop to the Ruine of his Religion; but it pleased God to cut him off before he had Reigned two Years.

Jovian, who succeeded him, began to endeavour zealously the Destruction of Heathenism; but in the seven Months of his Reign it was not possible for him to make any great Progress.

Valens, who had the Eastern Empire, gave Liberty of Conscience to all Men to worship what Gods they listed, and was himself more inclin-
inclined to support Arianism than Christianity. * So that during his Reign Sacrifices were publickly made, and Men eat the flesh of the Victims offered up to Idols. The Bacchanalian Mysteries were celebrated openly; they ran up and down with their Thyrsi in their Hands; they tore Dogs in pieces, and committed all the other Extravagances which are suitable to that Devotion.

Valentinian, his Brother, who had the Western Empire, was more zealous for the Glory of Christianity; but yet his Conduct was not so steady, as it should have been. He had made a Law to forbid all sorts of Nocturnal Ceremonies; whereupon Pratextatus, the Proconsul of Greece, represented to him, that if he took away from the Greeks those Ceremonies, to which they were so mighty addicted, they would lead their Lives unpleasantly. This prevailed with Valentinian, and he consented, that notwithstanding his Law, they might keep their old Customs. It is true, that we have this account from Zosimus a Pagan Historian; and one may say, that he invented it, to make us believe that the Pagans were still in some credit with the Emperors: But we answer, that Zosimus considering the condition which his Religion was in, was more likely to have been in an humor of complaining of Severities that were not acted, than of pleasing himself with the recital of a Favour that was never shown. But this is certain however, that there are old Inscriptions at Rome, and in other Cities of Italy, by which it is manifest, that under the Reign of Valentinian, Persons of great Quality celebrated the
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the Sacrifices called Taurobolia and Criobolia, that is to say, The sprinkling of Bulls Blood and Rams Blood. Nay, by the great number of those Inscriptions one would be made to think that those Ceremonies were the principal ones in fashion, during the time of this Valentinian, and the two other Emperors of the same Name.

Now they being the oddest and most singular of all the Heathen Rites, I suppose that a Description of 'em will not be irksome to the Reader. Prudentius, who perhaps had seen them, sets 'em down at length: There was a deep Pit dug into which the Person, for whom the Ceremonies were performed, descended with Sacred Ribons and a Crown upon his Head, and in a Drees altogether Mysterious: Over the Pit they placed a Covering made of Planks pierced through with a great many Holes: Upon the Covering they brought a Bull adorned with a Garland of Flowers and little Plates of Gold hanging upon his Horns and Forehead. Then his throat was Cut with a Sacred Knife, and his Blood dropt down through the holes that were in the Planks into the Pit, whilst the Person that stood there received it with much Devotion, catching it on his Forehead, his Cheeks, his Arms, his Shoulders, and every part of his Body, and being industrious that not one drop should fall any where but on himself. At last out he came, a frightful Spectacle, all daub'd with Blood, and his Hair, Beard and Cloaths still dropping with it; but his Comfort was, that his Sins were all wash'd away, and he was regenerated to all Eter-
Eternity: For, as it appears by the Inscription, this Sacrifice was to those who celebrated it, a Mystical and Eternal Regeneration. But unless it were renewed once in twenty Years, it would lose its Force, and the Perpetuity of its Duration. And Women, as well as Men, were capable of this Regeneration; and those who were not at the Ceremony, might receive the Benefit of it by Association: Nay, which is most remarkable of all, whole Cities sometimes performed it by Proxy or Deputation. This Sacrifice was now and then made for the Emperor's Health: And the Provinces made their Court to him by sending some Persons in their Name to bedaub himself with Bulls-blood, for the obtaining of a long and happy Life for the Emperor. All this may be proved out of the old Inscriptions.

But now we come to Theodosius and his Sons, who put a full Period to Pagan Superstitions. Theodosius began first in Egypt, where he caused all the Temples to be shut up: At last he went so far as to demolish the Temple of Serapis, which was the most famous of them all. And as Strabo informs us, there was nothing more Glorious in the whole Heathen Religion than the Pilgrimages which were made to Serapis: When the time, says he, of certain Festivals was near at Hand, it is hard to believe what a multitude of People went down the River from Alexandria to Canopus, where this Temple stood. Day and Night there was nothing to be seen, but Boats full of Men and Women, Singing and Dancing with all the liberty imaginable. At Canopus there were a vast number of Inns on the River side, which were of use for
for the entertainment of the Passengers and accommo-
dating them in their Divertisements. And there-
fore the Sophister Eunapius, who was a Pagan,
seems to have had amighty Concern for the
Temple of Serapis, and with Gall enough he de-
scribes its Destruction: Men(says he)that had ne-
ever heard the sound of War, shew'd themselves
mighty Valiant against the Stones of this Tem-
ple, but especially against the rich Offerings,
which it was full of: And in those Holy Places
they put Monks, a People (says he) infamous
and uselefs; who, because they wear a black
and slovenly Habit, arrogate to themselves a
Tyrannical Authority over the Minds of Men;
and instead of those Gods which the Light of
our natural Reason discovers to us, they set up
for Objects of our Adoration, the Heads of Ma-
lefaetors who were executed for their Crimes,
which they falt to preserve'em from Corrupti-
on. Thus does this impious Wretch treat Monks
and Relicks; and certainly the Liberty of those
times was very great, when such Invectives
were written against the Emperor's Religion.
Ruffinus informs us, that the Temple of Sera-
pis was found to be full of secret Passages, and
Machines contrived for the Impostures of the
Priests. He tells us, amongst other things, that
on the East side of the Temple there was a lit-
tle Window, through which, on a certain Day
of the Year, the Sun-beams entring, fell just
upon the Mouth of Serapis: At the same time,
an Image of the Sun made of Iron was brought
in, which being attracted by a great Load-stone
fixed in the Cieling, ascended up to the Image of
Serapis. Then they cried out, that the Sun fa-
luted
luted their God: But when the Iron Image fell down again, and the Sun-beams went off from Serapis's Mouth, they said, that the Sun, having finished his Complement, was retired, to go about his own Affairs.

After that Theodosius had defeated the Rebel Eugenius, he went to Rome, where still the Senate stood up for Paganism. Their chiefest Reason was, Because, for twelve hundred Years, Rome had thriven well enough with its Gods, from whom it had received all sorts of Prosperity. The Emperor made a Speech in the Senate-house, persuading them to embrace the Christian Religion; but they replied, That by Custom and Experience, they had found Paganism to be a good and convenient Religion; and if they change it for that of the Christians, they could not foresee what might be the Event. Was not this fine Theology, for the Roman Senate? Theodosius finding, that this was not the way to deal with them, told Them, That the publick Treasury was too much exhausted by making chargeable Sacrifices, and that he had Occasion to imploy that Money in paying his Armies. They replied, That their Sacrifices would not be acceptable, unless they were made at the Charge of the Publick. But that Inconvenience was no Argument with him: So he put an end to all Sacrifices and old Ceremonies. And Zosimus does not let slip the Occasion of observing, that from that time forwards all sorts of Misfortunes happened to the Roman Empire.

The same Author tells us, that when Theodosius made that Voyage to Rome, Serena, the Wife of
of Stilicon, entered into the Temple of the Mother of the Gods, to put some Affront upon her, and that she made bold to convert to her own use a fair Neck-lace, which the Goddess wore: This an old Vestal Virgin reproved her very sharply for, and, as she went out of the Temple, followed her, cursing her with a thousand Imprecations. After which, says Zosimus, the poor Serena was often frightened (both waking and sleeping) with a certain Apparition, that threatened her with sudden Death.

But the last Efforts of Paganism were those made by Symmachus, to obtain of the Emperors, Valentinian, Theodosius, and Arcadius, the Restoration of the Privileges of the Vestals, and of the Altar of Victory in the Capitol; but all the World knows with what Vigour St. Ambrose opposed him. Yet it appears by the very Proceedings in that Contention, that Rome did in those Days retain a strong Tincture of Paganism. For St. Ambrose asks Symmachus, why the Pagans are not contented with having the Publick Places, Portico's and Baths filled with their Idols, and if nothing will serve their turns, unless the Altar of Victory be set up in the very Capitol, which is the Place of the whole City, whither most Christians resort? That the Christians, says he, may, whether they will or no, have the Smoak of the Sacrifices blown in their Eyes, the Musick in their Ears, the Ashes in their Throats, and the Incense in their Noses.

Nay, even when Rome was besieged by Alaricus, in the Reign of Honorius, it was still full of Idols. Zosimus complains, that all things conspiring to the Ruin of that unhappy City, the Gods
Gods were not only robbed of their Ornaments, but even some of those that were of Gold or Silver were themselves melted down; of which Number was the Goddess of Fortitude, which from that time forward wholly abandoned the Romans. Though this be a lucky Hit, yet Zo- simus will never make it pass upon us for the true Cause of the taking of that City.

I am in some suspense, whether upon the Credit of this Author, we may admit the following Story to be true. Honorius forbade all Persons that were not of the Christian Religion, to appear at Court, with a Shoulder-belt, or to have any Military Command. Generidus, a Pagan and Barbarian too, but a Man of great Courage, who commanded the Troops that lay in Dalmatia and Pannonia, came no more into the Emperor’s Presence, laid aside his Shoulder-belt, and forbore to exercise his Charge. Honorius one Day asked him, how it came to pass, that he came not to Court in his Turn, as it was his Duty to do? To which he replied, That there was a Law made, that dispossessed him of his Belt, and his Command. The Emperor told him, that Law was not for such Men as he was; but he answered, that he could not take the Benefit of any Distinction that separated him from those who professed the same Worship with himself. In effect, he would not undertake to Act again in his Command, till the Emperor himself, compelled to it by Necessity, repealed that Law. If this Story be true, then we may easily judge that Honorius contributed very little to the Downfall of the Heathen Religion.

But
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But at last all Exercise of that Religion was prohibited on Pain of Death, by an Edict of the Emperor's, Valentinian the Third, and Martian, in the Year of Christ 451, and this was the last Blow given to that Superstition. And yet we find, that those very Emperors, who were so zealous for the Advancement of Christianity, did, for all that, themselves retain some Relicks of Heathenism, which served to augment their Authority. As for Example, They still took upon them the Title of Pontifex Maximus, that is to say, Chief Patriarch (as it were) of those who divined by the Flights of Birds, and the Entrails of Beasts, and of all the Colleges of Pagan Priests, and Supreme Head of all the ancient Romish Idolatry.

Zosimus pretends that Constantine the Great, Valentinian and Valens willingly accepted from the Heathen Priests both the Title and Habit of that Dignity, which according to Custom was presented to them at their Accession to the Empire; but that Gratian refused the Pontifical Office; which being related to the Priests, the principal amongst them replied in a great heat: Si Princeps non vult appellari Pontifex, admodum brevi Pontifex Maximus siet. The sharpness of which Saying lies wholly in the Latin words, and it was grounded on the Revolt of Maximus against Gratian at that time, with a design to strip him of the Empire.

But the old Inscriptions still remaining, are a Testimony of this Matter, more to be credited than Zosimus. There we see the Title of Pontifex Maximus given to the Christian Emperours, even in the sixth Century. Two hundred
dred Years after Christianity had ascended the Throne, the * Emperor Justin amongst his other Titles affirms that of Pontifex Maximus in an Inscription, which he had caused to be made for the City of Justinopolis in Istria, which was called by his Name.

To be one of the Gods of a false Religion was surely much worse than to be the Pontifex Maximus of it. Now the Heathens erected the Roman Emperors into Gods: And well they might, seeing they made the City of Rome a Goddess. The Emperors, Theodosius and Arcadius, tho' they were Christians, permitted Symmachus, that great Defender of the Heathen Religion, to give them the Title of (Vestra Divinitas, or) your Divinity: Which could be only taken in the Sense, and according to the Custom of the Pagans. And in some Inscriptions, which were set up in Honour of Arcadius and Honorius, these following Words are to be found: Devotus Numini Majestatis, eorum; that is, Devoted to their Divinity and Majesty.

But the Christian Emperors went farther than the bare receiving of those Titles; for they gave them to themselves: As appears by the Constitutions (or Laws) of Theodosius, Valentinian, Honorius and Arcadius; wherein they sometimes call their Edicts, Heavenly Statutes, and Divine Oracles: And sometimes they say expressly, The most happy Expedition of our Divinity, &c.

It may be said, that this was nothing but the Stile of the Court of Chancery; but it was
certainly an unjustifiable and ridiculous Stile under the Heathen Religion its self, and a blasphemous one under the Christian. And therefore it is very wonderful, that such like Extravagancies should become so familiar and common a way of speaking, that they were in every Bodies Mouth.

The Truth is, that Flattery, which Subjects are so apt to bestow upon their Sovereigns, and the natural Fondness which Princes have for Praise, made the Custom of using these Expressions, last longer than it ought to have done. I confess that the Flattery and the Fondness in this case were each of them very extraordinary in its kind: And it is no wonder, since they are things uncapable of being limited to any Bounds. That a Man should be in earnest when he gives another Man the Title of a God is hard to conceive, and yet the frequency takes of the Wonder; but that this Man should accept the Title, and that with so much Easiness, as by degrees to come to the giving of it to himself (and all this while have a right Notion of what is truly called God.) This, I say, is a thing that I know not how to give such an Account of, as will save the Honour of Human Nature.

As for the Title of Pontifex Maximus, I do not see what was in it, that could flatter the Vanity of the Christian Emperors into the making it so much their Interest to conserve it: But, perhaps, they thought that it was of some use for the imprinting of a respectfull Awe in the Minds of those that were still of the Heathen Religion: Or, it may be, they pleased them-
themselves with the Supremacy over Christians, which under the Ambiguity of that Title they assumed to themselves. In effect, upon certain occasions they were Magisterial enough in their use of it: And some Authors would perforce us, that the Emperors quitted their Pretensions to this Title, out of Respect to the Pope; who, it seems, began to be apprehensive that they might make ill Uses of it.

But it is not so surprizing by far, to see these Heathen Remains continue for some time in the Christian Religion, as to see what was most barbarous, extravagant, and directly opposite to Reason and the common Interest of Mankind, keep such firm footing, as to be the last that left the Field of all the Pagan Superstitions, I mean, Human Sacrifices. That Religion was certainly very Fantastical and full of Variety; for it consisted of some things extremely frolick, and others no less mournful. In one place, the Ladies go to the Temples in a fit of Devotion, to offer their Favours to the first Comer: And in another place, the same Devotion causes the Throats of Men to be cut upon an Altar. These detestable Sacrifices were practised by all Nations: The Grecians celebrated them, as well as the Scythians, tho' not so often; and the Romans (for all that they obliged the Carthaginians, in a Treaty of Peace concluded between them, not to Sacrifice their Children to Saturn, according to the Custom derived from their Ancestors, the Phænicians, yet) did themselves every Year offer up a Man to Jupiter Latialis. Eusebius cites Porphyrius for this, as a thing still in Usage.
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in his Days. *Lactantius* and *Prudentius*, the one in the beginning, and the other in the end of the fourth Age, are Evidences of the same thing, each of them for his own time. These Ceremonies, that were so full of Horror, lasted as long as the Superstition of *Oracles*, which was only liable to the Reproach of Stupidity and fond Credulity.

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C H A P. V.

That if Heathenism had not been abolisht, yet Oracles would have ceased; and the first particular Reason hereof.

The Downfall of Heathenism, when Christianity triumphed over it, could do no less than involve Oracles in the common Ruine with its self: But it may be farther ascerted that Christianity, even before it became the reigning Religion, was an irresistible Enemy to Oracles; for the Christians made it their Business to disabuse Mankind, and discover Impostures. And yet if the Christian Religion had never been, Oracles would for other Reasons have lost their Credit by degrees, and at last have quite fail'd.

It was observ'd that they began to degenerate from the very time when they left off giving their Answers in Verse. *Plutarch* has written a Tract expressly to enquire about the reason of this Change, wherein (according to
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The fashion of Greek Authors) he sets down all that could be said on this Subject, either true or false. First he says, That the God who inspires the Pythian Priestess proportions himself to her Capacity, and does not answer in Verse by her, unless she have a natural Faculty that way; for the Prediction only belongs to Apollo, but the manner of Expression to the Priestess. Thus it is not the Fault of the Musician, if he cannot make as good Melody with a Cittern as with a Lute; for the Property of the Instrument must be considered. Suppose, it had been the Custom for the Oracle to deliver its Answers in writing, could we reasonably deny that Apollo inspired 'em, unless the Priestess wrote 'em in a fair Hand. The Soul of the Prophetess, when united to Apollo, is like an innocent Maid when she is first Married, who is ignorant both of the Pleasure and the Duty of her new Condition.

But why then did the Ancient Priestesses always answer in Verse? Were not they as pure and Virgin Souls, contracted to Apollo? To this Plutarch replies first of all, That even the ancient Priestesses did now and then speak in Prose. And besides this, in old times all People were born Poets; so that, as he tells us, they had no sooner drank a little freely, but they made Verses; they had no sooner cast their Eyes on a handson Woman, but they were all Posie, and their very common Discourse fell naturally into Feet and Rhime: So that their Feasts and their Courtships were the most delectable things in the World. But now this Poetick Genius has deserted Man-
kind: and tho' our Passions be as ardent as those of our Ancestors, and we talk as much as they did, yet Love at present creeps in humble Prose. And even all the Socrateses and Platoes, who discoursed so much concerning that agreeable Passion, had not the least Skill in Poetry.

Now all this has too much Fancy and too little Truth in it, to deserve a serious Answer. But Plutarch gives us another Reason, which has something more of Probability; which is this, That the Ancients wrote always in Verse, whether they treated of Religion, Morality, Natural Philosophy or Astrology. Orpheus and Hesiod, whom every Body acknowledges for Poets, were Philosophers also; and Parmenides, Xenophanes, Empedocles, Eudoxus, and Thales, whom all Men own for Philosophers, were Poets too. It is very strange indeed that Poetry should be elder Brother to Prose, and that Men did not at first light upon the most natural and easy way of expressing their Thoughts; but it is very probable, that since all their Writings were as so many Precepts, they were shaped into measured Lines, that they might be the more easily remembered, and therefore all their Laws and their Rules of Morality were in Verse. By this we may see that Poetry had a much more serious beginning than is usually imagin'd, and that the Muses have of late Days mightily deviated from their original Gravity. Who would imagine that the old Statutes should by right have been written in Metre, and Chaucer's Tales in Prose? There was a necessity therefore, says Plutarch, that an-
ancient Oracles should be deliver'd in Verses, since all Matters of importance were so; for Apollo was then willing to follow the Mode of those Times, and when Prose came afterwards to be in use, he was for being in the Fashion still.

I am of the same Opinion myself, and believe that Oracles at first gave their Answers in Verse, both that they might be more easily remembred, and to comply with the Custom which had condemned Prose to be used only in trivial Discourses. But History and Philosophy began to shake off those useless Chains about the Reign of Cyrus: For Thales, who lived at that time, was one of the last Poetick Philosophers; but Apollo continued to speak in Verse till about Pyrrhus’s Days, as Cicero informs us, which was about two hundred and thirty Years after Cyrus. Whence it appears, that Poetry being found suitable to the Dignity of Oracles, it was retain’d in Use at Delphos, as long as it was possible; till at last plain Prose getting the Victory, banish’d it quite from thence.

Plutarch could hardly be in earnest, when he said, That Oracles were therefore at last pronounced in Prose, because People began to require clearer Answers, and to be weary of the misterious Bombast of Verses. For whether it were the Gods, or but the Priests that spoke, I would fain know how Men durst accuse them of Obscurity.

But he has more Probability on his side, when he pretends, that Prophetick Verifying fell into Contempt, by being in use amongst those Fortunetellers, who trifling about the High-ways, were consulted by the Rabble:

Now,
Now, the Priests who belonged to the Temples, scorn'd to use the same Customs in common with these Gypsies; for they thought themselves to be a nobler and graver sort of Fortune-tellers; which makes a mighty difference, I'll assure you, in this great Affair.

But Plutarch reserves his true Reason till last; which is, That in former times Men went to consult at Delphos only about Matters of the highest Consequence; as Wars, Building of Cities, Interest of Kings and Commonwealths; whereas now a-days, says he, every ordinary Person runs thither to ask the Oracle. If they shall Marry? If they shall buy a Slave? If they shall thrive by their Trade? and when a City sends thither, 'tis only to enquire, Whether their Lands will yield a good Crop, or their Cattle increase? These Questions deserve not the trouble of an Answer in Verse; for if Apollo should take that Pains, he would be like those Sophisters, who labour mightily to show their Learning, when there is no proper occasion for it.

But I come to that which was the most effectual Cause of the Ruine of Oracles: The Romans made themselves Masters of all Greece, and those Kindoms founded by Alexander's Successors; and as soon as the Grecians had submitted to the Roman Yoke, from which they had no hopes of being ever free, they were no longer agitated with the continual Divisions and Quarrels which had wont to harass those petty States, whose Interests were so mightily embroiled; for their common Masters made 'em all quiet, and Peace was the Product of their Slave-
Slavery. And I think, the Greeks had never happy Days till then; for they lived in a profound Tranquility, and in perfect Ease; they passed their time in their places of Exercise, in their Theatres, and in their Schools of Philosophy. They had publick Sports, Comedies, Disputations and Harangues; and for Men of their Genius, what could be desired more? But all this afforded little business for Oracles, and there was very seldom any occasion to importune the Delphian God. And it is very easy to imagine, that the Priests would not give themselves the trouble of answering in Verse, when they found their Trade fell off, and the Profit of it was not worth the while.

And as the Romans did the Oracles some prejudice by the Peace which they establish'd in Greece, so they did them more by the flight Esteem which they had of 'em themselves: for their Folly did not lye in that way; they addicted themselves only to the Books of the Sibyls, and to the Tuscan Divinations, which were performed by the Observations of the Flights of Birds, and the Entrails of sacrificed Beasts. Now the Maxims and Opinions of the Victors, easily obtain amongst the Conquered: and therefore it is no wonder that Oracles, being a Greek Invention, should follow the Fate of Greece; and that as with her they flourish'd in Prosperity, so with her they lost their ancient Glory.

But, for all this, we must acknowledge, that there were some Oracles in Italy. Tiberius, as Suetonius says, went to the Oracle of Geryon near Padua; where there was a certain Spring,
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if we will believe Claudian, which restored Speech to the Dumb, and healed all sorts of Diseases. Suetonius says further, that Tiberius had once a mind to destroy all the Oracles that were near Rome; but he was prevented by the Miracle of the Prænestine Lots, which, when they were brought up to Rome in a Box well lock'd and seal'd, were not to be found there; but when the Box was carried back to Prænesta, then they were found in it again.

To these Lots of Prænesta and those of

Stamin. Antium, we must add the Lots of

the * Temple of Hercules which was at Tiber.

Pliny the Younger thus describes the Oracle of Clitumnus, the God of a certain River in Umbria: The Temple is ancient and much revered; in it stands Clitumnus in a Roman Habit, and his Lots manifest his Presence and the Power of his Divinity. Round about it, there are several little Chapels, in some of which there are Fountains and Springs: for Clitumnus is, as it were, the Father of many other little Rivers which joyn with its Streams. There is a Bridge which separates the Sacred Part of these Waters from the Profane. Above this Bridge Men may only go in Boats; but below it they may bathe themselves in the River. This is the only River of my acquaintance that was Oracular, for they had other Business to do than to turn Fortune-tellers.

But there were Oracles at Rome itself. Had not Aesculapius one in his Temple which stood in an Island in the River Tiber? There has been found at Rome a piece of a Marble-table, wherein the Miracles of Aesculapius are engraven.
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In Greek. One of the most considerable of which, is this that follows, translated word for word from the Inscription: At the same time the Oracle made this Answer to a blind Man named Caius: He was bid go to the Sacred Altar, and Kneel down and Worship there; then to go from the Right-side to the Left, and lay his five Fingers upon the Altar, and afterwards clap his Hand upon his Eyes. After all this was done, the blind Man was restored to his Sight, as all the People were Witnesses, and testified the Joy which they received in seeing such mighty Wonders wrought in the Reign of our Emperor Antoninus. The two other Cures are less miraculous; for one was of a Pleurisy and the other of a loss of Blood; (both of 'em very desperate Diseases without doubt) but the God preferred to the sick Persons some Fine-apples and Honey, with Wine and certain Ashes; which were things that these Men who are something incredulous, will be apt to say are meerly Natural Remedies.

These Inscriptions, for all that they are in Greek, were certainly done at Rome; for the form of the Letters and the spelling do not at all seem to be from the hand of some Grecian Sculptor. Besides, tho' it be true, that the Romans made their Inscriptions in Latin, yet they made some few in Greek, especially when they had some particular reason for it. Now it is very probable, that no other Language but Greek was used in the Temple of Askulapius, because he was originally a Grecian God, and brought to Rome in that great Plague, of which every one knows the Story.

Thus
Thus we see that the Oracle of Aesculapius was not of a Roman Institution: and I doubt not, but that if it were an Enquiry worth the while, most of the Italian Oracles would be found to be of a Greek Original.

However it be, the smallness of the Number of the Italian Oracles, and even of those that were at Rome itself, makes but a very inconsiderable Exception to the generality of the Notion which we propose. Aesculapius dealt only in Physick, and concerned not himself in Matters of Government: and tho' he had a rare Knack at making blind Men see, yet I believe the Senate would have been loath to have depended upon his Advice in a Case even of the smallest importance. Private Persons amongst the Romans might give what Credit they lifted to Oracles; but the State had little Faith in them. Thus the Sibyls Books and the Entrails of Beasts governed all. And so a vast number of Gods fell into Contempt, when People took notice that the Masters of the World would not vouchsafe to consult 'em.

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CHAP. VI.

The second particular Cause of the Cessation of Oracles.

But I meet with a Difficulty in this Business, that I will not conceal: For if about the time of Pyrrhus, Apollo was reduced to Prose, this implies, that Oracles began then to grow into Discredit, and yet the Romans were not Masters of Greece till a long time after Pyrrhus; and between the Reign of Pyrrhus and the Romans Conquest of Greece, there were as many Wars and Commotions in that Country as ever, and by consequence as many important Subjects to consult the God of Delphos about.

This indeed is true; but we must also observe that about the time of Alexander the Great, a little before Pyrrhus's Days, there appeared in Greece certain great Sects of Philosophers, such as the Peripatetics and Epicureans, who made a Mock of Oracles. The Epicureans especially made Sport with the paltry Poetry that came from Delphos. For the Priests hammered out their Verses as well as they could, and they oftentimes committed Faults against the common Rules of Prosodia. Now those fleering Philosophers were mightily concerned that Apollo, the very God of Poetry should come so far behind Homer, who was but a mere Mortal, and was beholding to the same Apollo for his Inspirations.

It
It was to little purpose to excuse the matter, by saying, that the badness of the Verses was a kind of Testimony that they were made by a God, who nobly shorn’d to be tied up to Rules and to be confined to the Beauty of a Style. For this made no impression upon the Philosophers; who, to turn his Answer into Ridicule, compared it to the Story of a Painter who being hired to draw the Picture of a Horse tumbling on his Back upon the Ground, drew one running full speed: and when he was told, that this was not such a Picture as was bespoke, he turned it upside down, and then ask’d if the Horse did not tumble upon his back now. Thus these Philosophers jeered such Persons, who by a way of arguing that would serve both ways, could equally prove that the Verses were made by a God, whether they were good or bad.

So that at length the Priests of Delphos being quite baffled with the Raileries of those learned Wits, renounced all Verses, at least as to the speaking them from the Tripος; for there were still some Poets maintain’d in the Temple, who at leisure turned into Verse, what the Divine Fury had inspired the Pithian Priestess withal in Prose. It was very pretty, that Men could not be contented to take the Oracle just as it came piping hot from the Mouth of their God. But perhaps, when they had come a great way for it, they thought it would look silly to to carry home an Oracle in Prose.

Nay the Gods, being willing to keep up the use of Verses as long as ever they could, did now and then stoop to borrow a line or two out
out of Homer; whose Poetry, it seems, was better than their own. Of this there are abundance of Examples; but, both this borrowing of Verses, and keeping Poets at standing Wages in their Temples, may well pass for good Arguments that the old natural Poetry of Oracles had mightily lost its Reputation.

But these great Sects of Philosophers, Enemies to Oracles, must needs have done them a more essential Prejudice than the bare reducing them to Prose: For questionless they opened the Eyes of a great many rational Persons, and even amongst the Populace they made the Infallibility of those things lye under more suspicion than it had done before. For when Oracles first crept out into the World, Philosophy had not yet appeared.
The last particular Causes of the Cessation of Oracles.

The Cheats of Oracles were so gross, that at last they were discovered by a thousand several Accidents. I suppose that Oracles were at first entertained with Greediness and Joy, because that nothing could be more convenient than to have Gods always ready at hand to answer every Question that might be suggested by Uneasiness or Curiosity: And I fancy, that it was with a great deal Reluctancy that People parted with this supposed Conveniency; and that Oracles would never have come to an end as long as Heathenism lasted, if they had not been the most impertinent Things in the World. But at last Men were forced to yield to their own Experiences and suffer themselves to be disabused.

To this the Priests gave no small help by the extreme Impudence which they used in the Exercise of their false Ministry; for they thought that things were brought to such a Point, that there was no Occasion for any Circumspection.

I say nothing of the Waggishness of the Oracles, which they sometimes delivered: For example, * To a Man that came to ask of the Deity, What he should do to grow rich? He answered very pleasantly, That he need do no more than get all the Land between
between Sycione and Corinth. And sometimes the Consulter would make free with the God. Polemon, sleeping in the Temple of Æsculapius, to learn of him how to cure his Gout, the God appeared to him and told him, That he must abstain from cold Drink. Polemon replied, You would be puzzled then, my good Friend, if you were consulted about an Ox? But these were but the Gayeties and Frolicks of the Priests, who would sometimes both give and take a Jest.

But it was still more remarkable, that the Gods never failed to fall in love with the fair Ladies; for they must come and pass away the Nights in their Temples, tricked up for the purpose by their own Husbands, and furnished with Presents to make the God amends for his Pains. 'Tis not to be doubted, but that the Doors of the Temple were shut up in the sight of the whole World, but who could secure the Husbands against the Passages under Ground?

For my part, I do not question but such Intrigues were often practised. And Herodotus writes, that in the eighth and uppermost Story of that lofty Tower belonging to the Temple of Belus in Babylon, there was a magnificent Bed, where there lay every Night a pretty Woman selected by the God. The like was done at Thebes in Egypt: And when the Priestess of the Oracle of Patara in Lycia was to prophesie, she must first take a Night’s Lodging all alone in the Temple, whither Apollo came (forsooth) to inspire her.

All these things were practised during the darkest Mists of Paganism, and in times when Heathen Ceremonies were not to be contradicted;
dicted; but in the view of the very Christians themselves Saturn of Alexandria had such Women brought in the Night to his Temple, as he thought fit to chuse by the Mouth of his Priest Tyrannus. Many Women had received this Honour with a great deal of devout Respect; and none of them made any Complaints of Saturn, tho' he was the oldest and the least Gallant of all the Gods. But at last there was one, who having had her Night's Lodging in the Temple, considered with her self, that nothing had pass'd there, but what mortal Man was capable of performing, and Tyrannus could have done himself: And so she acquainted her Husband with her Suspicion, who hereupon accused Tyrannus. The unhappy Priest confessed all; and the Lord knows what a Scandal this gave to the Inhabitants of Alexandria.

Thus the Wickedness of the Priests, their Insolence, and several Chances that had discover'd their Cheats, and the Obscurity, Uncertainty and Falseness of their Answers would at last have quite ruined the Reputation of Oracles, and entirely abolish'd them, even if Heathenism had not been come to a Period. But the thing became more unavoidable by the Addition of other Foreign Reasons: Such as first the Raillery of the Grecian Philosophers; then the little Use the Romans had always of them; and last of all the Christians utter Detestation of them, and putting a full End to them and Paganism together.

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